

REDEFINING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT:  
THE EXPERIENCES OF  
WAHPETON DAKOTA CAREGIVERS

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By

Brenda Green

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this thesis was to explore Dakota Aboriginal caregivers' involvement in their children's education. The needs of Aboriginal parents, who may share different perspectives regarding the purposes of education, have been ignored historically because of North American assimilation policies. Thus, listening respectfully to the voices of the Wahpeton Dakota caregivers and understanding their involvement in their children's education has been the intent of this research. Qualitative research techniques were used to elicit narratives through semi-structured interviews. The participants in this research were able to reflect back to their childhood educational experiences— traditional and formal— and accept the sometimes troubled experiences that their education provided. Resilience prevailed, as the Aboriginal parents and care givers in this study envisioned a positive future for their own children.

The participants' narratives reflected similar, yet different expectations for “formal” education. In mainstream research literature, when educators define parent/care giver involvement, the ideal parent has been described as somehow directly involved in the school setting. This thesis challenges that perception and creates a different understanding of education for Wahpeton caregivers and its relevance to their children's lives. The Wahpeton parents and caregivers saw education as much more than academics. This viewpoint has the potential to provide a much more balanced, inclusive education process for our Aboriginal children.

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## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

One of my early childhood memories focuses on our regular Sunday visits to Wahpeton, my home reserve. The person we would visit regularly was Koshie, a small gray haired lady, who always displayed a calm demeanor. She sat in her chair beside the kitchen window, and not only could you feel the warmth of the wood stove but also the warmth she always showed us as we walked in the door. My mother's maternal grandmother, Koshie, was my mother's caregiver at the age of two, as well as the caregiver for her older sister and her three brothers.

My mother spoke Dakota to Koshie as soon as we arrived, interspersed with English if my dad was present. My dad would usually venture off to the dining room to visit with my great-grandmother's companion, Robert Goodvoice.

We would then rush outside to play in the bushes, to grasp a feeling of tranquility of the country which we were unable to achieve in the hectic lifestyle we encountered in the city. This was a lifestyle that had so much to teach me, but as yet I was too young to be interested.

The freedom and serenity of the reserve will never leave me. I remember playing in the forest with my younger brother, sisters and also other relatives who were visiting at the time. It was always quiet on the reserve. Reflecting on my early experiences, I think of ceremonies and pow-wows as happy times; they were a gathering time. As gentle voices were speaking inside Koshie's home, quiet rustling and laughter were experienced outside. I internalized the cultural transmission of peace and knowledge that was only to

cease with the death of my great-grandmother.

A cry, a shrill of sorrow fills my memory now, as I recall my mother at the death of my great-grandmother. The person she knew as her mother had died. Her own mother died when she was only six years old. This too was our death, not only because we lost someone we loved dearly, but because we lost the opportunity of retaining our culture. For me, unconscious learning about a strong, proud people and a way of life, both challenging and self-determining, had also dissipated.

A recent realization of the importance of these happy, serene times has allowed me to focus on a culture to which I felt no bond to when I was young. I did not realize that although the education I was receiving at that time did not have “textbook value”, there was a value that could never be taken away from me. A genuine desire to focus on my people—the Dakotas from Wahpeton Reserve—allowed me the opportunity to search and learn from the past. This education has allowed me to generate an understanding of my people's personal narratives and our common story.

Stories reflect reality in the world of education. Stories are essential in everybody's life; in fact, life is lived as a story. Oral transmission consists of many elements. Stories may describe how the world got to be the way it is, what is happening now and what is likely to happen. Each story displays values, beliefs and family traits for individuals to decipher.

On the other hand, narratives offer us an opportunity to reflect upon and understand personal history and experiences. Whether the effects of these experiences have been destructive, self-inflicted, or progressive is the listener's to determine.

However, in an utopian world, education would consist of stories and narratives that would not reflect divisions and boundaries, but rather initiate a desire to become respectful of other people's realities.

### **Background to the Problem**

Most Canadian Aboriginal people today have struggled to regain a firm understanding of their cultures, values and beliefs. Elders recognize that young people need to embrace culture and knowledge to their daily learning; integrating a "holistic" lifestyle is seen as an important aspect in becoming at peace with oneself within the community.

Indian cultures have ways of thought learning, teaching and communicating that are different from, but as valid as, those of white cultures. These thought-ways stand at the beginning of Indian time and are the foundations of our children's lives. Their full flower is being one of the people (Hampton, 1995, p.28).

As Aboriginal people we need to know who our ancestors were, and to understand the educational process that was an integral part of their culture. "Man has a continuing need to readapt his person, his society, and his culture to changes in nature, in society, and in self so as to achieve equilibrium sufficient to maintain life" (Hassrick, 1964, p.x). In Aboriginal cultures, the individual, therefore, strives to be complete in every way—spiritually, emotionally, physically, and mentally— within a holistic society.

Traditionally, the Dakota people focused on a holistic philosophy when attending to their daily life. For Dakota people, a society respectful of nature evolved. These people grew up together, knew each other quite intimately, and in order to survive harmoniously, needed to make their livelihood an enduring community enterprise. The

focus of this research story is to create a historical and contemporary understanding of how the Dakota people of the Wahpeton reserve are involved in their children's education today, in a way that is in harmony with their culture.

By reviewing the traditional education process of Dakota people, I now realize that the integration of "formal education" has been a part of their lives for quite some time now. The challenge, however, is to understand how Dakota people are involved in the process of expressing their values and ideas within a contemporary Canadian school environment. Tuhiwai-Smith (1999) explains that "Western culture constantly reaffirms the West's view of itself as the centre of legitimate knowledge, the arbiter of what counts as knowledge" (p.63). In this way, the educational philosophy of the predominant culture has predetermined what values are to be imposed on the Aboriginal community. The imposition of Western knowledge has been recognized as one of the major reasons for the high dropout of Aboriginal people in the regular educational system (Brady, 1996; Kirkness, 1992; Philips, 1993). This study takes a cross-cultural view of Dakota people's educational involvement.

There is a desperate need to address the reasons why these Aboriginal students are considered to be the "disadvantaged" and often feel compelled to leave the current education system. The mainstream goals of Euro-Centric education often conflict with what the Aboriginal community desires for their children. Philips (1993) and Valdez (1996) discovered that the values of the minority cultures they studied— American Indian and Hispanic—contradicted the beliefs of mainstream schooling. These two researchers were interested to see that the people in their studies wanted the best for their children,

but mostly they encouraged honesty, cultural and family values as an integral element of their children's education, seeing this as more important than academic achievement.

During the past few decades, community and parental involvement has been actively encouraged in North America. School-based programs have included parenting classes, parents volunteering as resource persons, and parent involvement in the classroom. Parents have been encouraged by various means— letters sent home, educator's invitation, employment, supervision, parent council meetings— to become involved with their children's education. Volunteers in schools tend to be those parents with higher socio-economic status, and the home-school liaison connections agenda has been primarily developed by parents who are visibly involved with their children's education. Consultants and administrators may collaborate with a particular group of parents to determine what is needed for their community, without consulting with a broader representation of the community. Marginalized peoples are therefore left out of the conversations.

Schools do not deliberately neglect parents from marginalized groups, but classify them as "difficult to reach", and so the cycle of dropouts continues. A variety of cultural groups needs to be considered when implementing parental involvement programs.

## **Purpose of the Study**

This qualitative research study focuses on the involvement of Aboriginal caregivers with the education of their children in a band school environment. Historically, Euro-educators viewed schools as a separate entity from the community. However, more partners— parents, community services— are currently included in the field of education. An understanding of what Aboriginal caregivers want for their children in education may help teachers bring culture and education together for all students.

Learning and understanding what Aboriginal parents want for their children is necessary in an education system which values cultural diversity. The research question is: **How are the Aboriginal caregivers of Wahpeton Dakota Reserve Band School involved in the process of their children's education?**

I interviewed six caregivers— three actively involved in the formal school setting and three who were not— from the Wahpeton Dakota Reserve to find out how they are involved in their children's education, and also their hopes for their children. I wanted to understand how the Dakota culture might have already become a part of the caregiver's desired knowledge for their children.

A limited amount of research has been carried out on Aboriginal caregivers' educational involvement with their children in a band school environment or within the regular system. This study should be valuable to band schools' personnel, public school personnel, curriculum writers, administrators, teachers and parent advocacy groups.

## **Researcher's Perspective**

I am a member of the Wahpeton Dakota Reserve. My cultural background is one-half Dakota, one-quarter Irish and one-quarter English. I feel my cultural diversity has allowed me to view society's differences from a bi-cultural perspective. I not only advocate acceptance and respect between cultures, but I also understand issues from both worlds. My ability to appropriately handle controversial issues reflects the world from a "unity" perspective.

Further, this perspective acknowledges the individual's unique experiences that may eventually influence the outlook relating to the rest of the world. An individual's viewpoint is subconsciously influenced by the "issues of the mind and body, individuals and nature, self and other, spirit and matter, and the knower and known " (Kincheloe, p. 42, 1991). Simultaneously, these influences either reflect mainstream societies' "hidden curriculum" or it will contradict this "hidden agenda". And rather than trying to "peg hole" our diversified world, I prefer to recognize "multiple constructs of reality."

My philosophy of life has assisted me in recognizing my advantages within both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. My personal experience within the Aboriginal community and the non-Aboriginal community is one of acceptance and respect. My professional experience is that of a elementary classroom teacher who has worked in a community school, in a middle-class public school and within an inner-city high-school. Through working in these environments, I have come to recognize the diversity of children's backgrounds.

## **Structure of the Thesis**

The thesis is structured in the following way:

1. Chapter One introduces the area of research, the question and why this research is important.
2. Chapter Two includes the literature review to support my study. This chapter looks at both the Aboriginal “traditional” education process and the Euro-Canadian “formal” education system.
3. Chapter Three describes the research methodology. This includes acknowledging the oral tradition of Aboriginal people and exploring the field of ethnography. I also describe my pilot study.
4. Chapter Four includes the field study reflection and the narratives of the Dakota caregivers with whom I researched.
5. Chapter Five includes the significance of formal Euro-Canadian education as well as challenges to the inadequacies of formal education for the Dakota participants in my study. The conclusion of this chapter begins to challenge the Euro-Canadian’s definitions of parental involvement.
6. Chapter Six concludes the study as I reflect on who I am now as a researcher and the need to recognize and acknowledge both Aboriginal researchers and Aboriginal parental involvement from a different perspective. This perspective respects the journey that Dakota people are on as they journey down the ‘Red Path’.



## **Definition of Terms**

Aboriginal: According to the Canadian Constitution of 1982, Aboriginal people of Canada include the Indian, Inuit, and Metis peoples of Canada.

Caregiver in a First Nation Community: “ It’s not unusual for a First Nations child to be reared by extended family members or community members. These caregivers are a child’s first teacher.” ( B.C. Aboriginal Headstart Program, 1997) For centuries, First Nation people have regarded children, not as their own, but a gift from the creator; it was the responsibility of the community to raise all children as their own. This belief still exists as grandparents, relatives and biological parents may have shared responsibility for a child. It is the intention of the researcher to use both terms caregiver and parent for the participants used in this study, respecting the traditional value of child rearing.

First Nations: Is a term used by Aboriginal groups of Native political organizations to refer to themselves. It means the first people of Canada.

Formal education: the process of education introduced by the Euro-Canadians.

Narratives: the voice of a individual expressing a reality. “Narrative, therefore, can convey the messiness of reality and the moral life and also something of its thickness and complexity”(Winston, 1998, p.18).

Native Americans: Is a term used by Native people of United States.

Oral Tradition: the process of traditional education which effectively preserved and transmitted the world view, values, philosophy and ideas of a particular culture. This process was used by Aboriginal people to teach their young; this process is still used today. Although there may be recognizable discrepancies between the teller and their

stories, the spirit and intent of these narratives are a valid form of transmitting information.

Red Road: Is the Dakota's spiritual journey. A person is to implementing all components of the Medicine wheel-emotional, physical, mental and spiritual– with the intention of nourishing the spirit.

Story: Is a planned expression of some happenings or a group of happenings.

Wahpeton: An Aboriginal reserve located approximately ten miles north-west of Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, Canada.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

This chapter begins by introducing the Dakota people through a narrative of their traditional knowledge. This is followed by a more academic historical account of the arrival of Dakota people in Canada. In using the metaphor of the “Red Path” to describe the Dakotas’ spiritual journey, I describe their traditional education. As a way to integrate Aboriginal world-views and academic knowledge, I argue for the importance of narrative. Then I address the imposition of Euro-Canadian formal education on the Dakota people and the evolution of the band-controlled school in response to this oppression. Lastly, I examine the research literature about caregivers and their involvement in formal schooling.

### **Creation of the Dakota Nations**

Sam Buffalo, a Wahpeton elder, shared his story with me through a personal audio tape interview (1996), of how the different linguistic groups of Dakota people came to be. According to Sam Buffalo, long ago the Dakota people were one large nation that lived on a large body of land close to the sea. A vision was seen by two old men who were told to search for a new land. The Creator told them to look for a hill of truth; and they were to go west. At the heart of the land there was to be a river, so the people moved westward and searched for many generations. They finally found a long river with many islands, which was drawing into a larger body of water. Many waterfalls were there. The Dakota people settled along the Mississippi River, thinking that they had found the land that was described by the holy men.

The Dakotas continued to travel down the Mississippi River to the Gulf of Mexico where a vision was seen again. This time the holy man told them to continue to search for the holy hill. The Dakotas proceeded west in search of the holy hill. They reached water again and the nation became confused and afraid. They felt that they had lost their way. They fought amongst themselves regarding the direction that they should follow. Some individuals went back in the same direction, others went east and others went south or north. Over a period of time, the language changed, but also stayed similar in many ways. This is how there came to be many linguistic groups of Dakota people. Although the languages varied, spirituality was consistently practiced amongst the Dakota nations.

#### **Who are the Dakotas from Wahpeton?**

The Dakota people consist of three linguistic groups called the Lakota, the Nakota, and the Dakota. The Lakota “use the l-dialect, which is spoken by the Western population including the Teton; the Nakota uses the n-dialect, used by the Assiniboines and the Stonies; and the Dakota speak the d-dialect, and they include the eastern Dakota” (Elias, 1988, p. xii). The Dakota or Santee were considered to be the trunk of the group, and each subsequent dialect was a branch of the Dakota people.

Historically, the Dakotas were a self-sufficient people who depended on hunting, gathering, fishing, and farming. During a personal interview, Sam Buffalo, an elder from Wahpeton Reserve, noted that the Dakota people lived in the upper Mississippi River area and continually travelled as far north as Saskatoon during their hunting season (1996). Lavolette states that according to oral tradition and archaeological evidence,

“before 1600's, all the Dakotas were Woodland tribes and they enjoyed a sedentary lifestyle since 700 A.D” (1988, p.2). Extensive trading linked all Indian nations during that peaceful era, and it was not until the colonization process of the Americans and the effects of American Revolution in 1776, that events began to dramatically change the Dakotas' way of life.

Military alliances were established with the Indian nations by the Americans and the British; the Dakota established firm alliances with the Crown. “When the British were defeated in 1783, Wapasha, the Dakota chief, accepted the fact, but refused to transfer his allegiance to the Americans” (Elias, 1988, p.8). Again the War of 1812 saw the Dakota in military alliance with the British. This alliance with the Crown would eventually grant the Dakotas sanctuary, if needed. In 1884 an English official stated, "The King your Great Father has assured you that he will never abandon his Red Children whom he has so long fostered and adopted", a promise that would eventually need to be honored (“Provost to Bathurst”, Elias, 1988, p.11).

The subsistence level of farming then practiced by the Dakotas eventually became unpredictable because of the American's ploy of continually uprooting the Dakota people and ignoring their desire to claim their land through the Treaties of Traverse des Sioux and Mendota in 1851. Even though the Dakota people were forced to start over again on new soil, they progressed quickly by attaining new homes and some eventually became farming instructors for their own villages.

However, as settlers began to expand and claim rights to this rich Minnesota farmland, the Dakota received marginal benefits compared to their white neighbours.

They did not possess legal or political stature in their state of affairs; “instead they were coerced into obedience by the annuities which replaced the game they had once been free to hunt and were forced within the confines of the reserve” (Elias, 1988, p. 17).

This instigated retaliations against the American government. In 1862, at Little Big Horn, an uprising lasted for approximately one month and thousands of Dakotas were imprisoned in stockades. Others faced starvation, exposure and torment (Elias, 1988, p. 19). This began the northward movement for the Dakota people of my research.

Lavoilette wrote that it was mentioned that Honorable James Mackay, a trader who spoke Dakota, encouraged individuals to move to Prince Albert where skilled workers were needed to build a new lumber mill. Eventually, ten families moved west of Prince Albert to a place known as Round Plain. These Dakota were recognized for their hard work and they became productive and appreciated members of the community. “The Dakotas moved in as a mobile, casual labour force, a role they adopted over the next few years until they established a reserve for themselves” (1989, p.260).

A reserve was requested on January 27, 1890 for 148 people. “On January 27, 1890, R.I. Pritchard of Prince Albert, wrote to D.P. MacDowell, Member of Parliament for the riding in support of the creation of a reserve, farm implements and a school for them” (Lavoilette, 1989, p.260). Lavoilette expands by stating that there was a request from the government that these people should become part of White Cap reserve and Chief White Cap would be their leader. The Dakota people from Wahpeton did not wish to have White Cap as their chief because they felt they would not respect him. Instead they had their own chief, Chief Ayanki, a descendant of the great Chief Flying Thunder.

The Dakota people wished to have land in the Prince Albert area and the whiteman's education so their children would be able to function in the whiteman's world (1989).

A reserve was granted on the basis of 80 acres for every five persons. Sam Buffalo, a Dakota elder, stated that in 1894 the reserve was surveyed. Even though the government had given these people a few implements, they refused to give the band a mower and a rake. Therefore, several families moved to White Cap's reserve. Those who stayed worked at various occupations: maintenance, farming, meat-cutters, and in the lumber industry. Eventually, a school in Prince Albert was needed for the children to honour the desire for education for the Dakota children.

Lucy Baker School, a residential school, was built for the Dakota children. The children were picked up and transported to the school. Sam Buffalo notes that orphans were taken to this school without choice. The Dakota people did not understand this strange foreign system, so children were allowed to go without protest (1996).

Rita Parenteau (1996), an elder of the reserve, adamantly stated that the residential school was not a good experience. This was the beginning of the erosion of her cultural beliefs. She had spent thirteen years learning the way of the Dakota people, and now she was forced to abandon her culture and adopt the beliefs of a foreign system (Personal interview, 1996). Instead of believing in her Creator, Wakan Tanka, who was considered to be loving and accepting, she was forced to believe in a punishing God. "Wakan Tanka was not aloof, apart and ever seeking to quell evil forces. He did not punish the animals and the birds, and like wise, he did not punish man. He was not a punishing god" (Time, 1992, p.11). The Residential school assisted in abolishing a

culture, in not only a mental and spiritual capacity, but also physically. Many children died of pneumonia and other diseases.

In 1919, a smallpox epidemic wiped out most of the people, and the reserve was reduced from eight to six families. Sam recalled that the reserve suffered a difficult time. The reserve's population consisted of only ten families by the 1940's. Chief Ayanki died in 1930 and a new chief was elected. Then Chief Dumont died in October, 1936. The reserve lived without a chief and council until 1960. Although the Dakota people experienced many difficult periods, they endured in a stable community.

Elder Sam Buffalo mentions that a north-west pilgrimage -- praying, spiritual ceremonies, and holy dances--brought them to an area that could be claimed as their reserve, Wahpeton. Although this parcel of land cannot compare to the land they once roamed, it was "legally" theirs (Personal interview, 1996).

The history of how a group of people came to be encourages me to imagine what it must have been like for my people. I have an appreciation of the Dakota people who struggled for existence among a Western society that once regarded them as an obstacle to economic development. Understanding their reality, by reflecting on past experiences to appreciation of the present aspirations, has created the people they are today. The struggle to survive as a distinct people continues; instead of becoming assimilated, the Dakota people have endured by reconnecting to their beliefs, values and spirituality.

As a Dakota woman, I was not raised with these understandings because of the assimilation process. I came to know about the spirituality of the Dakota people only recently. Yet, I view this knowledge to be important, because as a learner I have been



introduced to beliefs and values which thrive amongst those who have not lost the "traditional" sense of their being. Therefore, seeking to understand only empowers the individual who seeks. It is my purpose to engage my readers with a Dakota spiritual journey, sharing the experience of a distinct and proud people. Educators need to "give voice to people who have not been heard because their points of view were believed to be unimportant or difficult to access by those in power" (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, p.10). My society has many cultural beliefs that have evolved from the traditional teachings.

### **Traditional Education**

Traditional teachings related to spirituality in all aspects of daily living. Ross (1989), a respected educator and a member of one of the original seven tribes of the Dakota nations, analyzed Native philosophy and compared it to Western ideology. He claimed that traditional teachings, although centered around holistic thought, focused on using the right hemisphere of the brain while our current Western education encompasses predominantly the left side of the brain. "The left side of the brain controls logic, linearity, reading and writing, time orientation, and masculine expression. The right side of the brain is dominant in instinct, holism, dance, art spatiality, and feminine expression" (Ross, 1989, p.14). Therefore, traditional teachings for the Dakota people included a holistic teaching process— emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual. The spiritual vision of "the Red Path" inspired these people to live in balance and harmony with all.

## **The Red Path**

The Dakota people believed in the most holy one, their spiritual leader Wakan Tanka. Throughout Dakota records, tapes and biographies, the terms "Red Path" or "Red Road" are continuously used in reference to the Dakota people. The reference to the Sacred Hoop and Red Path are similar in meaning. Black Elk, a Dakota spiritual leader, refers to the Ghost Dance as uniting " his people back into the sacred hoop, that they might again walk the red road in a sacred manner pleasing to the Powers of the Universe that are One Power " ( Neihardt, 1979, p.238).

Robert Goodvoice, a Dakota Elder, shared his understanding with me on an audio tape and significance of the "Red Path" (1977). Robert noted that this story was passed to him by his grandfather and had been previously passed down for four generations. The Red Path has existed since the beginning of time, before the human race began.

“ One beautiful morning as the Dakota people camped by the seashore, a person was seen standing on the water. This individual told the Dakota nation that a path began from where this individual was standing and it continued west. At the end of the Red Path there is a "crown of White". Work throughout your life for that crown and if when you arrive at this stage, the crown will be in your possession. Further west, there is a land above and on this land there is no end to life, but a life full of happiness.”

The spirit world used a crown of white to parallel the white hair of an old person. Each person was to live a life of kindness, goodness, and honesty, and this in turn would ensure a happy everlasting life. The vision said that clothing in this world has no seams; it is like an old man's skin. This is the spirit world.

The spiritual aspect of the Dakota people was once a daily lived experience reflecting the medicine wheel. To completely live life with respect, we need to nourish our emotional, physical, mental and spiritual well-being. Understanding the significance of the Dakota's Red Road best reflects the education of a people who integrated these values into their lifestyle. Holistic thinking was used in spiritual teachings. For example:

"the pipe ceremony. The tobacco placed in the pipe represents the green things, the four-legged, the winged ones, and all the things in the water. You ask all these things to come into the pipe. You offer the pipe to the four directions up to the mystery spirits of the universe, and down to Mother Earth. When you smoke the pipe, you're asking all these things to come into you and to be one with you. That's holistic thinking " (Ross, 1989, p.16).

Standing Bear, who wrote My People the Sioux in 1928, states that children learned to be with one in all, because we all drink the same water and breathe the same air: " In traditional Dakota society, each child ventured out into the real world and personally discovered and experienced this truth" (Knudtson & Suzuki, 1992, p. 171).

Spirituality is one common element that all indigenous nations acknowledge and respect. "Indigenous people construct their teachings around the belief that at certain places there is a sacred ambiance that can and does empower human consciousness and spirituality" (Battiste, 2000, p.67). The spiritual aspect in oral storytelling links us to that place with other cultures "telling stories helps us to understand culture, societies, values and mores" (Cassady, 1990, p.11). We can recognize that most stories contain universal and common elements. These similarities and differences can be combined to create understanding among our cultural diversity, such as the Spirit World.

## **The Sun Dance**

The origin and significance of the Sun Dance for the Dakota people was shared on a archive tape, Cankudato: Beginning of the Sundance and Red Path Medicine, by Robert Goodvoice in 1977. According to Goodvoice, at the beginning of time the Dakota people faced a long period of drought. Water was not available for anybody -- people or animals. The old people were beginning to suffer and become weak, so they were left in a spot where they could gather.

Strong boys were sent out to look for water, but only came back frustrated because there was no water anywhere. They searched in sloughs, creeks, rivers and lakes. Animals of many varieties were situated at a small river which was the only trickle of water available. The animals were also in desperate need of water.

Small blue stones were gathered for the old people. These stones were the size of marbles; the old people placed them in their mouth to help the thirst that parched their throats. The Dakota people felt that they were being punished for something, but they were unsure of what.

Four men were sent out in each of the four directions, leaving a space of land in the center for the others. The men prayed to the creator, and the people in the center also prayed and cried. Eventually, lightning could be heard, and a cloud appeared, gradually spreading across the sky. The people were asked to stand up and to hold their hands to the clouds.

In no time, the rain poured down on them, and the people gathered the rain with birch bark cups, dishes, and rawhides from animals. They also dug holes in the ground,

so water could accumulate and be kept until later. The Dakota people continued to pray, beginning before mid-day, until sunset. The rain continued until evening, filling up all the rivers, creeks, and lakes.

The people prayed, thanking the Creator. They faced south and sang the song of Thanksgiving. The Dakota clapped their hands, danced, prayed and whistled with whistles made from bone and wood. The people stood in a circle and faced south. Everybody danced until dark--eating, dancing and drinking. They stayed there for four days.

Four strong men were sent out in different directions to see if there was water throughout the land. They did not see a bird, but animals could be seen searching for water and others were dead. Water filled the land, allowing all living things to survive. The elders told the people that the Creator was pleased that the people gave thanks with their songs.

The Sundance originated this way; it gives thanks for the gift of water and for saving the life of all animals. This water sustains all living things. Plants can therefore grow, and fruit is available for man to consume. Dakota people always sat in a horseshoe shape facing south. They danced for a half a day, and broke up in the evening.

The Dakota people thanked the creator during the day, then under the moonlight and starlight, and they faced the sun as it came up, and then they faced the south at mid-day. By performing the Sundance in this fashion, they believed they would continue to receive the blessing of water from above. For it was the Creator that heard them sing their songs of thanksgiving.

The season of the Sundance is when the leaves of the poplar trees become the size of a quarter. At any time during the year praying is done to Wakan Tanka, the most holy, for the good that he has done. If relatives, children, or family members are sick, an individual may pray to Wakan Tanka for the return of their health. These individuals go outside and pray facing the rising sun and they continue to pray until mid-day. When these individuals become healthy, a promise is made to the most holy, to leave all earthly habits such as eating, drinking and sleeping for a period of one day and one night. This must be done during the Sundance season.

The people involved with healing enter the Sundance lodge first. Inside the lodge, they sit at the north end facing south. The Dakota singers are on the west side of the lodge. The ceremony always begins by remembering the day that the Dakotas were dying of thirst. The ceremonial articles— pipes, rattles, drums—are blessed with sweet grass. The articles are always wrapped. The smoke of the sweet grass rises, purifying the items. The spirit of the air, day and night, respect the transaction that has happened; then ceremonies and prayers are performed within the lodge to give thanks to the Creator. After sundown the people move outside and they begin the Sundance.

There were times that men and women went out with the sick to a hill and fasted for a night and day. Eventually, a voice would be heard, telling them that their prayers and cries were heard. Robert Goodvoice mentioned that people were healed of many ailments, such as diseases, blindness, legs that were limping, and bones that were broken. All these sicknesses could be healed by the most Holy, Wakan Tanka (Goodvoice, 1977).

The Sundance was a very respectful time. Respect was shown for the lodge, and

items used; the respect for the gods was a part of all individuals involved. Using their heart, mind and spirituality was a process that needed to be followed for the desired healing to be achieved.

After the land was overtaken by settlers, the religion of the Ghost Dance developed. Paiute Messiah- a sacred man- had a vision of how their lands could be saved and how the white man would disappear. Black Elk spoke of how he came to know of this religion and how it became a part of the Dakota people. This religion speaks of a new world, a place where the buffalo would roam the land and all Indian people would come together again, both the living and the dead. Wovoka, who was a prominent spiritual leader at this time, spoke of another world:

Just like a cloud. It would come in a whirlwind out of the west and would crush out everything on this world, which was old and dying. In that other world there was plenty of meat, just like old times; and in that world all the dead Indians were alive, and all the bison that had ever been killed were roaming around again (Neihardt, 1979, p.233).

Black Elk also had a vision in which he would be able to bring his people back to the 'sacred' hoop and once again they would walk down the Red Path. Black Elk was frustrated with the current conditions of his people. Through the middle of the circle or oval, there was a path that extended through the circle at both ends. Once the persons lived their life fully, they would venture down this path called the Red Hoop Path and the Red Road Path to reach the Spirit World. The Dakota people were expected to enter through each stage in a respectful, fulfilling manner because eventually they too, would walk the Red Road.

These stories were generational teachings of how the Dakota people expressed

their understandings of their existence on this earth. Historical narratives are still told by Aboriginal historians, elders, and spiritual leaders by using both oral transmission as well as the written word. The stories from an important part of traditional education for Dakota people.

### **Summary of Traditional Education**

These stories shared by elders Robert Goodvoice, Sam Buffalo and Black Elk were the historical description of the origin and development of Dakota cultural values and beliefs. Narratives and stories play an important part in understanding a culture; they are powerful sharing tools. Historically, stories defined an individual's role as situations arose in daily living, “often the type of stories we tell help us restructure our experiences and so pass them on. Story telling shows us the truth of who and why we are” (Cassady, 1990, p.11). In teaching values and rituals celebrated by a cultural group, stories and narratives served as values and belief transformers.

Currently, ethno-cultural diversity exists in most communities. People who live in North America hold a variety of beliefs and values that should not be systematically replaced with others. Resisting the imposition of colonial power, society needs to understand the traditional indigenous views. Alfred (1999) states that indigenous power “focuses on whether or not power is used in a way that contributes to the creation and maintenance of balance and peaceful coexistence in a web of relationships”(p.49).

Today, stories are primarily communicated in literary text. This text can be a reflection of reality or reconstruction. Euro-Canadian history as we know it was primarily told from the perspective of those who wrote the stories. This literary text



tended to exclude those who did not depend on the written word to share their stories.

The formal education process has imposed these Euro-Canadian perspectives on those it taught:

The effects reach deep into the structure of public schooling and include: an epistemic arrogance and faith in certainty that sanctions pedagogical practices and public spheres in which cultural differences are viewed as threatening; knowledge becomes positioned in curricula as a object of mastery and control (Giroux, 1996, p. 65).

Thus, sameness was encouraged in the formal education process, a favourable position to those born into this Euro-Canadian reality, but devastating to the traditional education of Aboriginal peoples.

### **History of Formal Education for Aboriginal Children**

Formal Euro-Canadian education began by deliberately imposing policies to regulate Aboriginal lives, but instead it isolated them and caused socioeconomic and cultural exclusion for many groups. One of the first assimilation policies imposed residential school on Aboriginal people in Canada. These policies introduced to the Aboriginal people, ignored their diverse language or belief system. Consequently, a variety of schooling approaches were introduced including day schools and band schools.

Historically, education for Aboriginal children has developed in response to insensate goals dictated by the Euro-Canadian system. This was the not the purpose of education for Aboriginal children by First Nations leaders.

Chief Shingwauk's dream was the vision of the "teaching" wigwam.

In 1832 Augustine Shingwauk accompanied his father, Shingwaukonce (Little Pine), and several other leaders of the Garden River Ojibway by canoe to York (Toronto) to see the king's representative. Their purpose was to consult with Lieutenant Governor Colborne concerning 'what should we should do about religion' ([http://collections.ic.gc.ca/shingwauk/Section2/section4\\_2](http://collections.ic.gc.ca/shingwauk/Section2/section4_2)).

There was confusion regarding the intent of religion and its teachings. Christian missionaries, as far back as the 17<sup>th</sup> century, began the process of formal education for Aboriginal people by introducing education and religion simultaneously through residential schools. Undeniably, formal European education was the inception of a cultural deterioration, but the colonization process of Aboriginal people ultimately failed.

The *Davin Report of 1879* concluded that residential and boarding schools would be successful with their intended goals only if the children were removed from their homes and communities. The effects of this primary objective was devastating, as over 50% of the children who did attend these schools did not live to see the end of their schooling (Kirkness, 1992, p. 10).

In 1969, the federal government in Canada issued the *White Paper* Indian Policy which encouraged Aboriginal peoples to recognize an absolute need to control their own educational destiny. The *White Paper* suggested further federal government jurisdiction to assimilate Aboriginal peoples. In 1972, the National Indian Brotherhood issued "Indian Control of Indian Education." This document stated "only Indian peoples can develop a suitable philosophy of education based on Indian values adapted to modern living" (Indian Control, 1972). Policy was then developed that allowed provincial bands control of their own educational goals. As a result, three school jurisdictions were

operated and funded by the Department of Indian Affairs. These institutes were the federal day schools, provincial day schools and band schools; band schools were influenced by the band's initiatives.

### **Band Schools**

The formal education European system had failed Aboriginal peoples, who did not view their system as "unitary, monolithic sets of rules and beliefs, but rather as an interplay of cultural values and overlapping political processes of struggle, accommodation and resistance" (Giroux & McLaren, 1986, p.228-229). As a result, Aboriginal people decided to control their children's educational destiny, so band schools were introduced. Although the Federal government continued to control the budgets, band schools included Aboriginal people as partners in their children's education. The Band schools and the reserve communities became involved in defining the needs of their children, while abiding by the existing provincial curriculum guidelines.

While the band schools were adjusting to this new privilege, increased community involvement and parental involvement was beginning to take place in the Euro-Canadian system.

### **History of Wahpeton Band School**

This reality revolved around the Wahpeton Dakota Band school. In the fall of 1979, the Wahpeton Band School began in a tipi with ten students enrolled. Initially, this school was developed because the students who were bussed into a provincial rural school were facing racism. The chief at the time, Cy Standing, began the process of establishing funds to build a school to accommodate their children. From the tipi, the

school moved into a portable trailer, and eventually a portion of the gym and the band office were renovated into classrooms. Finally, in 1981 a school was built.

### **Evolution of Community Involvement**

In the nineteenth century, Euro-Canadian education focused on transferring the basics of literacy and numeracy to children through direct instruction by teachers.

Teachers and administrators were required to participate in the formal process of educating students, while parents were directly involved with the everyday basic needs of their children. Because of the social, economic situations, values and beliefs of this era, this type of education was acceptable.

The predominant needs of society have continuously dictated the goals of education. I recall a discussion by a former professor, David Blades, on the historical evolution of education curriculum. The industrial age produced workers; Sputnik demanded scientists, while the era of colonization of the Americas required "assimilated Christians" (Blades, personal communication, 1996). These curriculum demands have created similar prescribed education curricula while negating communities with different worldviews.

The impetus to understand individual and global narratives occurs in a pluralistic world. These narratives are simultaneous attempts to explain the world—to create a new global reality—and attempt to further the aspiration, hopes, political agendas and ego needs of different people. This allows our children to think, accept and form new ideologies, in a world of understanding others. From past to present, the focus on change

has created a repertoire of educational needs. Education is a catalyst for all partners involved.

At one time, formal schooling involved only those individuals employed as educators, while the community focused on extra-curricular activities. It has only been recently that the community has been seen as an asset in assisting the school in achieving its intended goals. The school has changed from teaching the basics to becoming a center in which to educate the whole child. The concept of parental involvement now includes the concept of community involvement.

### **Why the need for the Involvement of Caregivers and Community**

Caregivers and community are vital partners in the process of education. However, varied worldviews may conflict with what the current education system is offering. The differences between Aboriginal and Euro-Canadian worldviews are exemplified in contrasting perspectives on the role of the nuclear family in society. David Elkind (Scherer, 1996) defines the "nuclear family" as consisting of a "stable family foundation" with two parents. The mother stayed at home and nurtured the children while the father went out to earn a living for his family ( p.6). This assumed family structure allowed the school to focus solely on teaching the basics to their students, without having to be concerned with other societal issues, thus allowing various options for the child. Supposedly, this process would result in a firm basis from which the child could independently venture into the world, assuming that the home and school had the same cultural values.

This definition of a stable family assumes that nuclear families were cohesive

forces that collaboratively worked and co-existed together. Thus, the Euro-Canadian term— nuclear families— has been defined by the predominant culture. It is imperative to understand that families from different cultural backgrounds had their own definitions of a functioning family. Extended family played a major role in parenting for Aboriginal families. This meant that for these types of arrangements the family extended beyond the immediate biological parents to a community network.

The social and economic conditions of today have also promoted change. Many lower socio-economic families are struggling with financial and social difficulties while the upper middle class family may have become consumed with inefficient time management and materialistic wants. Consequently, these two diverse situations initiate confusion as to how to best nurture children. One result of these varied family dynamics may mean that academic learning is one segment of the many complex issues that face parents and children today.

Schools have become places where family stresses are visible. Because society is continually changing, children may encounter a multitude of problems and expectations placed on them--the child caregiver, the surrogate parent, the racially discriminated against, the latch-key child, the abused, the child consumed with extra-curricular activities, the neglected; the list goes on and on. "Up until mid-century, most young people died from polio, tuberculosis, from disease, but today we lose as many young people through stress-related causes as we once lost through disease" (Scherer, 1997, p. 7). These deplorable facts indicate a new agenda for educators that will need to accommodate the diversity of all children. Respecting what parents want for their

children is necessary to accommodate the diversity of children's needs. The current “formal” education system may not be meeting the needs of children and their care givers. Parents and the community need to become contributing partners in the education process in ways different from those defined by the Euro-Canadian education system. An effort to support this concept has been introduced by looking a different approach to education.

### **Community Schools in Saskatchewan**

The strength of the Community Schools program is the hard work and dedication of those who work at the grassroots level. This program is a community-based partnership among educators, human service organizations, community school councils and other community members. These people are what make Saskatchewan Community Schools work (Atkinson, 1997).

The Community Schools program serves 8,500 students in urban centres around the province of Saskatchewan. The program uses a holistic approach to help students who are facing barriers to learning caused primarily by poverty. The program promotes shared responsibility and culturally affirming approaches to education. Active parental and community involvement is also fundamental to the program (Saskatchewan receives National Reward for Community Schools, May 16, 1997). This thrust to recognize the community and its parents continues to be a focus for the provincial education system. Research indicates that parents are a very important component of ensuring success for their children in a “formal” educational environment including those who may have varied needs.

## **Traditional Aboriginal Parental Involvement**

Traditional parental involvement reflected mainstream society's understanding. The studies of how to encourage Aboriginal parental involvement have been somewhat limited especially those involving Canadian Aboriginal families. Stokes (1997) describes research carried out on the Menominee Indian Reservation, Wisconsin and how appropriate changes were implemented so that the children (64.2% of whom living in poverty) could succeed. Her research acknowledges that integrated curriculum was a major component in beginning the process. This involved all the key players on the reserve, such as tribal leaders, elders, teachers and parents. Recognizing culture as a primary component of a successful school environment is conducive to learning for Native American children (Coggins, Williams, & Radin, 1997). McLean (1997) refers to these elements, as expressed by rural Alaska native parents, to be important: programs and personnel that will support and implement cultural values; educators that go to homes to foster trust and respect; educational opportunities need to be available to the very young and parents and teachers "need to be active partners in the education of children, blending culture together" (p.25). Actively involving those who have been marginalized is a futuristic concept; the challenge is considerable. Historically, this viewpoint has been ignored by enforcing an elitist perspective of education.



## **Defining Parent Education**

Many programs have been initiated throughout North America for both community and parents. Programs that have been initiated according to the needs of the school community occur in all types of schools, from private schools to inner-city schools. Cheng-Gorman and Balter (1997) classify parenting programs in "four distinct target groups. There are programs designed to improve parenting; programs aimed at specific populations of parents; programs focused on specific populations of children; and programs geared toward generally well functioning parents who desire knowledge in child rearing" ( p.341).

Most of these parental involvement programs have been designed by administrators themselves without the input from caregivers. A Massachusetts elementary school claims to have created a community with its outreach strategies. "Salstonstall School is the product of a collaborative planning process that began with Salem city officials, faculty from Salem State College, and Salem public school teachers. This collaboration eventually included, in its later stages, parents of incoming students" (Fowler & Klebs-Corley, 1996, p.24). This collaboration network tends to funnel down to the parents in the last stages of planning. This model of parental involvement can be seen in more than one scenario throughout North America. Although each school has its own remedy for its current conditions, it appears that most parent programs have been initiated by the hierarchy of educational officials.

Families have become involved, regardless of their socio-economic status, because parents love their children and want the best for them (McGee, 1996; Dodd, 1996). At times educators have become frustrated in trying to involve all parents. Dodd

(1996) interviewed 15 inner-city parents and found that parents did not often understand what the school consisted of, or if problems arose they were left unresolved, yet they had strong opinions on what their children should be taught. Dodd acknowledges that “what the state expects for every child may conflict with what parents expect for their child” (1996, p. 45). To empower parents by acknowledging what they want for their children could be the approach to increasing parental involvement.

On the other hand, there are schools that have encouraged parents’ support by implementing programs that reflect the families’ needs. One such type of school would be considered the service school, that assists with life-skills and supports parents and their children in achieving a successful lifestyle. These programs may consist of health, welfare, recreation and life enhancing programs (Dryfoos, 1996). Other schools may enhance the already strongly parent supported curriculum with self-contained academic programs and workshops to encourage all parental involvement or multilingual liaisons to link families to schools (McGee, 1996; Fowler & Klebs-Corley, 1996; Halford, 1996). These channels encourage the parents to become actively involved in their child's success.

Some parents resist the focus that schools have taken by continually “remembering their school days or the way they want the basics taught” (Dodd, 1996, p. 44). Historically, educators dictated a colonial approach to assimilate students. Thus, those people who were a part of this system would rather remain neutral or resist than become a part of the system that regulated them. These perceptions could be dispelled by encouraging parents to see the need for change and how education should respond to society's diverse problems. Joe Duquette High School, an Aboriginal cultural school,

focuses on involving not only parents but other community members as well, if they share an invested interest. This involvement is transcended by being committed to:

provid(ing) important continuity, keep(ing) a strong perspective on the original vision for the school and are in a position to offer informed, critical perspectives on suggestions for change or persistent problems (Haig-Brown, Hodgson-Smith, Regnier, Archibald, 1997, p.155).

The benefits of involving parents outweighs the negative aspects. Studies have demonstrated that students' academic performance increases when families are involved (Fowler & Klebs-Corley, 1996).

### **Initiating Aboriginal Community Involvement**

Involvement includes many components, and each part should be defined by the needs of the schools' community. Similarly, the school includes many diverse cultural beliefs, values and learning styles. A study conducted by Philips (1972) on Warm Springs Reservation, Oregon, and further reflected upon by Gilliland (1992) and Stokes (1997) recognized the differences in learning styles between the school and community. These researchers noted that Native American children learned by observing their parents and later reflected on this knowledge, while most middle class Caucasian parents taught their children by talking to them. Thus, conflicting learning styles, as well as cultural values may prohibit the Aboriginal child from gaining from the formal educational realm. The needs of the school's children should be defined by the parents themselves, in collaboration with educators.

Stokes (1997) proposed that integrating culturally relevant concepts would

validate the communities' values and cultural identity. Developing themes that are relevant to each school community could inspire individuals of all cultures to become involved in the school; the results would benefit all those involved, especially the children. Empowering the parents would increase a sense of ownership of their programs, and then educators could recognize the needs of the community.

A common concern raised by educators is the lack of direct involvement by Aboriginal parents. There is a realization that there may be many factors that contribute to this exclusion-- poverty, lack of understanding, irrelevance of curriculum, and insensitivity shown by non-native teachers (Brady, 1996; Hall, 1990). On the other hand, there are Aboriginal parents that have felt that their voice would not provide a significant change to the current system or that they have not been directly asked to become involved (McLean, 1997; Stokes, 1997).

Another obstacle that emerges is lack of clarity about what Aboriginal communities want for their children. Changing perceptions of First Nations, traditions and culture has been altered by the outside world (McLean, 1997; Coggins, 1997). "Traditionalists live in accordance with culturally prescribed customs; marginal and middle-class Indians are caught between traditional roots and white society; and pan-Indians struggle to re-establish lost traditions in a way that encompasses tribal variation" (Coggins, 1997, p.3). The term "Middle-class Indians" does not necessarily mean those who want to gain material wealth. Rather this term may refer to those who obtain this status and regard it as assisting their people to a place of self-determination rather than

powerlessness. A common focus for Aboriginal parents is concern for the well-being and cultural adaptability of children (Robinson-Zahartu, 1996; McLean, 1997; Coggins, 1997). Therefore, society should not “essentialize” Aboriginal parents’ responses.

Aboriginal communities have been actively concerned about the destiny of education for the past few decades, because “for the Canadian Native student, the consequences of leaving school prior to graduation are significant. While accurate figures are difficult to obtain, the rate at which Native youth prematurely exit the education system is substantially higher than that of the general population” (Brady, 1996, p.10).

It is the responsibility of all participants to assist in the process of education. Most Aboriginal peoples do not want segregation, but would prefer a system that affirms their values and beliefs. It is “not good to deny our Indianness but not good to proclaim it or impose it on others. We are only to affirm it” (Archibald, 1993, p.189). Assimilation has been ineffective when educating First Nations’ children; negotiation between the First Nation people and educators needs to be recognized as part of the solution. “This is a time when there should be readiness to listen to the parents and elders” (Robinson-Zanartu, 1996, p. 33). Stairs (1992) states that schools are “critical sites for agents of negotiation among cultures in context” and that schools are “not merely transmitters of the means of success in the dominant culture” (p.155).

Within the school system, success for the Aboriginal child depends upon being

acknowledged as a significant and contributing member of society. By allowing the caregivers to become involved in this process, success is more likely. A Navajo school-- Ganado Primary School— shares their success by employing fifty parents who work with small family classroom units. These multi-aged classrooms promote a collaborative family approach (Elliot, 1997). And although the parents are not exclusively involved in curriculum decisions, it is fair to say that the children thrive in an environment developed for them, as Native Americans. For this reason, Richardson (1997) quotes an administrator who acknowledges community involvement in Oregon; he recognizes the need for a collaborative rapport with parents, rather than the administrators regarding “our way as the only way” (p. 4). Cultures have their own set of beliefs, values and customs and accordingly we should celebrate these differences (Cheng, Gorman & Balter, 1997).

## **Conclusion**

Understanding others and their aspirations for their children benefits educators. Gitlin (1994) recognizes that " in part, the purpose is to make it possible for those writing their histories to look at the relation between their own understandings of teaching and schooling and others' understanding" (p. 53).

One reason, therefore, for the telling of stories is that they give those who have been historically disenfranchised a voice, an opportunity to speak out. The opportunity to speak out does not assure that one's voice will be heard, but it does have the immediate effect of providing groups with a potential source of power that can enable them to participate more fully in educational discussions (Gitlin, 1994, p. 52).

Therefore, a story's profound relevance should be reflected in educational research. Not only can stories acknowledge difference, but they also empower those who have been silenced. By beginning to understand the variety of individuals' narratives, the predominant society may focus on establishing a respectful, responsive education system.

## **Chapter Three: Review of Methodology**

### **Introduction**

This study has a qualitative research design which utilizes ethnographic techniques. It was my hope to write this study from a “holistic perspective to gain a comprehensive and complete picture” of my participants and the community where they live (Fetterman, 1989, p.29). This chapter will begin by discussing the relationship of ethnography with oral narratives. Next, I will explain why narratives and stories are important to sustain the Dakota culture. Lastly, I discuss how my method of research helped me learn “from people in a culture what it is like to be part of their world” (Chiseri-Strater & Sunstein, 1997, p.3).

### **Rationale for Research Methods Chosen**

Traditionally, First Nations people were oral people. This tradition has somewhat deteriorated, but the struggle to continue its legacy has been acknowledged by many elders. Because of the negative effects of residential schooling, some Aboriginal participants may have felt more comfortable sharing their stories orally, rather than with the pen. Thus, utilizing the narrative as a methodology is one way to capture the essence of the Dakota people. Within conversational sharing, a trusting rapport can be developed. It is through this technique that a sense of character, feeling, and empathy can be encouraged.



Ethnographic techniques involved the Dakota caregivers by engaging them in an informative, research based dialogue that “discover(ed) a culture’s way of being, knowing and understanding” (Chiseri-Strater & Sunstein, 1997, p.3). Designing overarching questions gave me guidance to ensure the participants had a place to initiate thought about their own education as well as that of their children. Dialogue evolved into comfortable, trusting rapport. Participant observation allowed the moment to be captured and reflected what these people felt at the time. Traditionally, cultural ways were shared through narratives; the participants’ narratives, encouraged through the semi-structured interviews, were culturally congruent.

## **Oral Tradition**

Cultural values and beliefs have continually been transferred through the oral tradition of stories within First Nations' cultures. “The natives of Canada had an oral literature that had been transmitted by word of mouth from generation to generation through storytelling, song and public ceremony” (Petrone, 1990, p. 9). Presently, the desire to retain the cultural beliefs and values is of utmost importance to First Nations' peoples. The recognition of the oral tradition is still very prevalent among most Aboriginal communities, but there is a fear that eventually this tradition will be lost. The oral tradition of storytelling incorporated all aspects of life which included the spiritual, the humanistic, and respect for nature:

American Indian legends originated from a variety of experience. Some describe the beauty and power of the landscape. Others reflect themes of natural phenomena, creation myths the origin of fire, historical events and customs, and the mystical beliefs of north American Indians (Edmonds & Clark, 1989, p.xiv ).

Respect was given to storytellers as they shared their relationship to one another and their environment. These stories had different meanings; these oral experiences expressed profound meaning.

The Canadian government's intended goal to eliminate Aboriginal cultures by imposing strict regulations, policies, and inhumane residential schools resulted in the depletion of an oral history, but this history is now being recovered by elder storytellers. Aboriginal storytellers are rememberers and share an important historical perspective. Because of the intense apprenticeship undergone by the storytellers, their oral history has great power.

Oral narratives have been the foundation of the Dakota culture. The stories taught us how to live, gave reasons for why things are as they are, recorded history, entertained, helped to make meaning of experiences, counseled and comforted, and allowed us to see our significance in this world through oral teachings. Traditionally, the elders played a major role in the education of young people. Stories and factual events were told to help the young people generate a cultural value system. Rita Buffalo (1996), (through a personal interview), shared the importance of teachings from older people involved in her life. There were certain explicit and underlying expectations placed upon

individuals to become a significant people in their society. Everyone had an important role within their community and it was up to the family members to help generate a humble, yet proud person. The Dakota people respected all life everywhere.

Robert Goodvoice, who was my Koshie's partner, shared the message of how vital the oral tradition was in the education of the Dakota people. When he was a young boy, he was always accustomed to being one of four or five people listening to his grandfather after supper. On one of the tape cassettes from Wahpeton's library, Story of Makace Toamaniwin, Robert mentioned how he now talks into a tape recorder without having anybody to listen to his stories (1977). He wanted to tape these stories so the grandchildren would be able to understand the history of the Dakota people, but he described how difficult it was to talk to a tape recorder without an active, listening audience.

This statement saddened me because the elders are our only historians. Robert is a man I once knew well, and I think of the learning I missed without realizing it at the time. Buffalo (1996) stated that an elder at Standing Buffalo reserve had asked him to share eight stories about the Dakota people. He was asked to write them in both English and Dakota. This elder said that the grandchildren will need to know the story of the Dakotas; therefore, they should be written so the young people can learn from them. Unfortunately the stories were lost to time. Sam was an intelligent, verbally gifted person and his mind was alert, but physically, Sam was in a wheel chair; his condition prohibited him from performing this task. Sam has since passed away.

We as Dakota people have a responsibility to gain this historical knowledge by helping elders tell their stories. The elders are our only link to the past; we need to acknowledge the strength of the oral tradition through our support of them. The grandchildren are the future of the Dakota people; we believe they need to learn about their past. As a member of the Wahpeton Dakota Band, the education that I have received through these personal narratives has been invaluable. As a mother, I now know what it must have felt like for my grandmother who contracted tuberculosis from a society foreign to her, and who was not able to physically hold her young children because she was quarantined. The history of these people of strength has been a series of difficult and triumphant times.

The tradition of storytelling and oral narratives actively involves an audience; it is a personal and powerful interaction. "The teller is magic. Because this person goes beyond themselves into mystical realms where anything is real. The teller spins webs of intrigue, of beauty more beautiful than anything we've seen, of sadness so intense it cannot be borne" (Cassady, 1990, p. 5). The storyteller has a profound connection to the story being shared. The story may be a narrative that has been passed down from generation to generation, or it may be a personal story, but the association to the story itself develops a unique relationship between the teller and the listener.

Dakota people are not part of the grand narratives that "dominate Western cultural models with their attendant notion of universally valid knowledge" (Giroux, 1990, p.8). Rather, Dakota people from Wahpeton reserve have their own stories and

narratives depending on their particular traditional knowledge and upbringing.

Storytelling, therefore, becomes a commitment between the teller and the listener. This dual relationship allows the opportunity for those involved to communicate openly through a wealth of narratives. A dialogue can be mutually shared in a conversation which includes past and present accounts of their lives. A storyteller's interaction becomes a profound sharing of history and culture. The respect and honor of continuing the oral tradition is reflected in my research, which incorporated narrative interviews.

### **Exploring Ethnography**

Chiseri-Strater and Sunstein (1997) support my reasoning by defining ethnography as "the study of people in other cultures and the resultant written text from that study; note that a fieldworker can adapt ethnographic methods for research and writing without producing a full-length ethnography" (p.43). This research does not include an extensive ethnographic frame, but uses some of its methods.

Bogdan & Biklen (1982) stipulate that qualitative research allows the researcher "to share in the meanings that the cultural participants take for granted and then to depict the new understanding for the reader and for outsiders" ( p. 36). My goal was to become a part of the community, realizing that "members of any community cannot be considered to be experts of all sorts" (Gitlin, 1994, p.183). It was through this reintroduction to my community that my appreciation of my people was rejuvenated.

I realize that my tie within this community influences my perception of reality. Fetterman (1989) reflects that researchers can only describe partially what they see or

what their participants have done previously to arrive at their disposition in life and “can only produce an essence of a culture” ( p. 34). All knowledge is situated. A positive characteristic, as a researcher, is that I had never been a direct part of this community. I have lived all of my life in a rural setting with a bi-cultural influence. This means that I was able to move to an outsider’s perspective with little difficulty. It is important that “the fieldworker must combine an outsider’s point of view– emic– with an insider’s perspective– epic” (Chiseri-Strater & Sunstein, 1997, p.14). I was somewhat familiar with Wahpeton Dakota education, ceremonies, and the holistic values that we regard as important. I had a need to understand and to become knowledgeable as a Dakota person, mother, and educator. My “commitment is an emic one– to capture the perspective of the insiders in the culture” (Chiseri-Strater & Sunstein, 1997, p.15).

### **Being Open-minded, yet Reflective**

A value many Indian people share is that their stories, languages, customs, songs, and dances and ways of thinking and learning must be preserved because they sustain the life of the individual, family and community. It is especially the stories that integrate the life experience and reflect the essence of the people's sense of spiritual being; it is mythic stories of a people that form the script for cultural process and experience (Cajete,1994, p. 41).

This quote helps me to understand that the researcher has to be careful not to generalize about a person from an Aboriginal background. Rather “a nonjudgmental orientation helps an ethnographer because it prevents them from making inappropriate and unnecessary value judgements about what they observe” (Fetterman, 1989, p.33).

This resonates with a conversation I had with an Aboriginal teacher colleague. I realize now that her story contradicted the traditional sense of how I thought Aboriginal people viewed “learning”. I now understand that as Aboriginal peoples we may have become ingrained in a system that some may have struggled against. This teacher valued academic success because she commented to the children “This is going to be my little doctor, and yes, this is going to be my little lawyer.” These words puzzled me at the time.

From this conversation, I questioned what mainstream educators acknowledge as success. I realize that even though I am a product of the post-secondary education process, it is not my will to impose my views and values upon a child. The teacher I describe in this vignette was Aboriginal, and she too had been socialized into believing that success in a child's life is becoming "someone," which she had blatantly acknowledged in her classroom. Is success determined as academic achievement or rather is it a sense of understanding oneself and giving what we perceive as our gifts back to humankind?

It is the educator's obligation to understand what parents want for their children as they venture into the world. Rightfully, formal education consumes a major portion of a child's life, but realistically, for the majority of people, it only encompasses approximately twelve years of their life. Accordingly, a variety of situations influence a person's growth and well-being. Cajete's (1994) challenges educators to create a path for our children that allows us to be accommodating “through constant and creative adjustment, teachers and students engage in a symbiotic relationship and form feed back loops around what is being learned”(p. 17). This can only be done by “living and

exploring a culture of people” (Fetterman, 1989; Gitlin, 1994; Lecompte & Preissle, 1993). The tools of ethnography offer these gifts so that the researcher can become effective when exploring others.

## **Ethnography and Culture**

Understanding that the word culture implies a vast complexity of definitions, I have chosen Cheiseri-Stater and Sunstein’s definition because it is one of acceptance and ties in with the Dakota caregivers with whom I spoke:

We define culture as an invisible web of behaviors, patterns, rules and rituals of a group of people who have contact with one another and share common languages (1997, p. 3).

We need to acknowledge cultural diversity as significant in our approach to educating children. A quest for “certainty” has been influential since the beginning of time. The search to define what is “right” for all has determined the goals of education for centuries. Consequently, this view to obtain certainty has failed those who do not fit into mainstream society.

Upcoming researchers should recognize culture as relevant when determining future aspirations in the field of education. The Dakota participants may see life through a different lens; therefore, they may not fit traditional Euro-Canadian theory based research findings.



## **Description of Data Collection**

Interviewing allows the researcher to work collaboratively with the informants "to gather descriptive data in the subject's own words so that the researcher can develop insights on how subjects interpret some piece of the world" and it is through the semi-structured interviews that I conducted my research (Bogdan & Biklin, 1988, p. 135). My involvement in the Aboriginal world was an asset to my study, and being a member of the Wahpeton reserve made me more acceptable to the participants. Fetterman (1989) credits that a "structured or semi-structured interview is most valuable when the field worker comprehends the fundamentals of a community from an 'insiders' perspective" (p. 48).

A pilot study introduced me to interviewing an individual who could have been a participant in my formal research study. This respondent had successfully filled the expectations required--Aboriginal parent, familiar with Aboriginal ties to her community, diverse upbringing compared to most children raised in urban school setting. I had a connection to her through friends of the family, even though I had not formally met her, through Aboriginal community links. I was able to gain rapport. This comfortable situation allowed me to revise the interview process. Also, this experience enabled me to ask the appropriate questions to achieve "thick, rich description and dialogue relevant to what occurs at a setting" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 86). I felt that a respectful, trusting relationship invited "a purposeful conversation between two people" (Bogdan & Biklen, p. 135).

## **Data Analysis**

Bogdan & Biklin (1982) offer insight on what not to be intimidated by while in the process of collecting data. These areas include: the freedom to speculate, to generate your own ideas about certain patterns of conversation the researcher may notice “the lack of confidence one usually feels on the first research attempts often makes one too cautious about forming ideas”; venting-sharing ideas, “mulling over ideas creates energy you may want to vent”; and finally, editing “with a lot of chicken scratches” assists with the data analysis coding process (p.155). Developing my own research style and rapport with my participants allowed me the freedom to express the Dakota parents’ stories.

While collecting data, I used field notes to record the mood and feeling of the participants, so this was not lost during translation. I ensured that the conversation was accurately transcribed by hiring a transcriber. Therefore, my job as the researcher was to grasp the essence of the interview I had with these individuals.

Coding consisted of categorizing the information into themes and sub-themes. LaCompte and Preissle (1993) compare this process to piecing together a jigsaw puzzle. Initially, the pieces of the puzzle do not mean anything and as time proceeds the puzzle begins to a more coherent form. First, I continuously read through the data. Secondly, I acknowledged the events that repeatedly stood out. Thirdly, I organized words and patterns that were prevalent into categories (Bogdan & Biklin, 1982). These categories evolved from the common themes. These common patterns were organized on a chart, using check marks to note apparent consistencies. Colour coding was used with different

highlighters to first acknowledge all themes that were obvious.

After this step, the researcher will “indicate how units are like and unlike each other” (LaCompte & Preissle, 1993, p. 242). Collecting and revisiting the inconsistent themes gave insight to what their significance was to the study. Speculating and making inferences became part of the process. LaCompte & Preissle state that with it, the investigator can go beyond the data and make guesses about what will happen in the future, based upon what has been learned in the past about what is presently known about other studies (1993). This process was done by comparing other studies on the topic of Aboriginal parental involvement in the field of education and respecting the culture of one Dakota nation.

### **Research Protocol on the Wahpeton Dakota Reserve**

My focus was to “watch what people do, listen to what is said, and to interact with the participants” (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, p.196). I became familiar with the school setting and the school's learning environment. McCall-Simmons notes that participant observation is “a process in which the observer's presence in a social situation is maintained for the purpose of scientific investigation” (p. 91, 1996). I was familiar with Leo Omani's thesis on an appropriate research protocol of Wahpeton Reserve. My expectation was to understand and learn from this community, and it was my goal to reflect a perspective that answered my research question.

Leo Omani's thesis “Developing A Process for Conducting Educational Research with the People of Wahpeton” (1992), identified three common themes that were relevant

to my study. Through his pilot study a student had noted that when the first question was to be presented it was important to begin with the statement “ As a person of Wahpeton...” (36). This step was done in each of the interviews to allow the focus to begin by verbally identifying the participant as a member of his/her community.

He stated three themes out of four were apparent after this process was conducted:

(1) Steps, (2) Rules, and (3) Contract.

(1) Steps: The researcher is to obtain approval of the study by the Band council, Chief, Elders and School committee. These significant parties are to be notified of the research, its significance and its contribution to the Dakota people of Wahpeton. Once the research has been approved, the role of the School committee will be "to work as a liaison between the Chief, Council along with the researcher to explain the research to the community" (p.80). This step was done as explained in Chapter 4.

(2) Rules: Respect for the Wahpeton people must be a priority when conducting research on their reserve. Confidentiality is needed when interviewing these selected individuals because of the size of the community. A willingness to be open-minded and honest before and during these interviews would allow accurate accounts of these people. Thus, some knowledge about the people and the culture would be of an asset (p.84). Confidentiality was ensured by keeping the transcripts in a secure, safe file with me. My discs were always kept on me as well, while I was working on my work. Confidentiality was used by identifying my participants with pseudonyms and not using any identifiable information.

(3) Contract: Expectations are to be written up in a contract so all parties involved will have a firm understanding of what the research will involve. These are the areas that are to be included in the contract: What time frame will be expected to successfully complete the research? Will the data be available to Wahpeton and what will be the method of collecting data? How will the research benefit the community of Wahpeton? Once these guidelines have been negotiated, the Band council, School committee and the researcher will write up the terms of the contract (p.96). Contracts or informed consents have been outlined and with the final completion of my thesis, my research will be shared with the community. I included recommendations in my final chapters for the Wahpeton school to review.

The steps recommended through Leo's thesis have been respected and honoured. I have appreciated the outlined protocol on how to conduct research.

## **Conclusion**

My desire to acknowledge what Aboriginal parents need and want has inspired me to research my question: **How are the Aboriginal caregivers of Wahpeton Dakota Reserve Band School involved in the process of their children's education?** It was my intent to contribute to the field of educational research without neglecting the protocol and respect of this community. The results of this research provided insight into an area of education that acknowledged the voices of the silenced. The opportunity to elicit their story was provided by using ethnographic techniques— semi-structured interviews, conversation and observation. The informal conversations encouraged the oral tradition to

evolve through expressions of personal history, present reflections and consideration of future generations. This is to be part of the story of my people, the Dakota people of Wahpeton.

## Chapter Four

### Narratives Shared by Caregivers from Wahpeton Dakota Reserve

*You must speak straight so that your words may go as sunlight into our hearts.*

*Chief Cochise, Ciricahua Apache  
Nation*

Friesen, 1998, p. 50

#### Introduction

This chapter describes my entry into the field – in this case, my home reserve of Wahpeton Dakota. It includes a description of the reserve setting and the participants, and lastly, my own reflections regarding the data that were collected. The chapter presents the narratives shared by participants in our conversational interviews. These narratives allowed me to understand something of the participants and how they arrived at the thinking they have now. The interviewees varied in age from age twenty-four to fifty-four, but though their age varied, many experiences in formal schooling did not. Three of the participants came from the residential school era, two respondents did not, and one individual did not attend formal school at all. In all cases, their early lives reflected some traditional knowledge that their family members taught to them. Some were taught to ignore their Aboriginal culture so as to encourage their absorption into the Euro-Canadian world. The respondents' parents understanding of their culture and traditions also varied--some practiced their culture daily while others did not. Some families were cohesive while others became disconnected from each other and from Aboriginal values. Various transitions were encountered, in both the formal and informal

education process, and varied from family to family. These changes included movement from one school to another in a short span of time, situations where the school was located far away, to the school that was located close to their families' homes, or moving from a traditional family to a school environment that did not encourage the teaching of the Aboriginal culture. I will reflect their understandings and experiences, as well as sharing my participants' narratives as respectfully as possible.

The semi-structured interviews evolved into a trusting, sincere conversation so "that the readers of the final report should be able to understand the culture even though they may not have directly experienced it "(Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996, p. 607). The environment in which the interviews took place allowed each individual to feel comfortable; I felt as though I was a welcomed relative coming to visit. All the interviews except one took place on Wahpeton Dakota reserve. The other was held at my mother's home in Prince Albert, which felt almost like an extension of the homes on the reserve.

Structured interview questions were used to begin the conversation; however, the questioning flowed into eliciting narratives that reflected openness and trust. I "encouraged the subject to talk in the area of interest and then probed more deeply, picking up on the topics and issues the respondent initiated" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1988, p. 95). These people knew who my relatives were, and I had apprehensions of these connections because of the chief and council family ties. Also, I met most of my participants through word of mouth and formally we had not established a trusting



relationship; however, it was evident through the interviews that I had a deep connection with these participants. The participants were comfortable with themselves and where they came from. They shared the genuineness of their character and their aspirations for their children through experiences of past education, their observation of the current system, and future reflections about an enriched life for their offspring.

### **Field Study Reflection**

Contextualization gives the researcher a broader look at the environment in which the research question will evolve. Fetterman (1989) speaks of contextualizing data as “placing observations into a larger perspective” (p. 29). This allows the researcher to observe the reality in which the research is done. This reality revolved around the Wahpeton Dakota Band school.

In the year 2001, there was an expansion to accommodate the increase in numbers of students at Wahpeton Band school. Currently, they register sixty-one students in the school— 43 in grades Kindergarten to grade six, and eighteen registered in grades seven to nine as of May 2001. There are three professional teachers with their B.Ed; a Dakota first language teacher, a para-professional who teaches Kindergarten and pre-school; a principal and an Education coordinator. Their mission statement encourages a strong academic focus, as well as a firm understanding of the Dakota culture. The school begins at 9 a.m and ends at 4 p.m. The cultural component is taught the last half hour of the day.

The Wapheton Dakota band school has a number of graduates who have

succeeded to grade twelve; and a large proportion of these students--up to 80%--have continued with post-secondary education. Even though the classes were initially from kindergarten to grade six--now grade nine-- these statistics continue to be stable. Some of the reserve students are bussed into the city to attend school when they reach grade seven.

The school has a relaxed, accepting manner; the staff and children are friendly. The school has an active school committee that consists of parents who are quite active in their school's initiatives and goals. Individuals from the staff are comfortable in sharing the school's events and programs. The school is quite small, and the learning atmosphere reflects the fact that the community supports each other in the educational context.

Wahpeton No. 94A is ten km northwest of Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. It is officially a Dakota reserve; however, other nations live there as well. One hundred and ten registered males and one hundred and nineteen females live on the reserve. There are 143 registered band members that live off the reserve. Four elected councillors and one chief ([www.inac.gc.ca](http://www.inac.gc.ca)) are presently part of the council. I know from looking at the names that I am closely related to three of the five First Nations band officials. This reserve is small compared to other reserves, and somehow this leads to the community's intimate ambience. I was anxious to become reacquainted with my heritage and community.

*If the Great Spirit wanted men to stay in one place he would make the world stand still....*

*Chief Flying Hawk, Oglala Sioux Nation  
Friesen, 1998, p. 20*

A feeling of apprehension and excitement overwhelmed me, as my three children and I passed a four-way crossing, before entering the reserve. I realized that the process of interviewing was something that was going to be a new experience for me. Fetterman (1989) states that “protocol exists for all interviews--the product of the interviewer’s and the participant’s personalities and moods, the formality or informality of the setting, the stage of research” (p.55). Basically, there was a lot on my mind. Not only was I approaching my reserve from a journalist’s perspective, I was also presenting a research question that I hoped would inspire these individuals to look deep within their hearts for an answer. I too needed to be responsive, yet professional and articulate in how I presented myself.

Before entering the reserve, I told my children that there was once a large two-storey farm house that stood tall and erect on the corner. However, a house trailer now occupied that space. Apparently, the house had been burnt down years before. This unforeseen change disrupted my train of thought, as I approached the reserve. I had been to the reserve on a number of occasions to participate in family functions, funerals and ceremonies, but somehow at these times my thoughts were more concerned with the events rather than the physical changes that had taken place on the reserve. Today, and for the rest of my field study, I would reflect back to my memories as a young person. I would look to see how these memories compared with my life now, as a grown woman with many life experiences.

These reflections began with my initial contact with the Wahpeton Band to initiate

my study. Before meeting my first participant at the chosen meeting place, I had to gain permission from the Wahpeton Band, as well as encourage individuals to join my study. I attended a school board meeting March 17, 1998 to explain my research.

The boardroom contained a large rectangular table with approximately twelve chairs. Individuals were sitting around the table reviewing the agenda for the meeting. I listened intently while they discussed issues concerning the Wahpeton Band School. I sat for approximately twenty minutes before they attended to my item. I described my research, the board took a vote and gave me permission to initiate my study.

After the meeting, some individuals from the school committee expressed their interest in becoming participants. I also needed to include people who were not necessarily involved in their child's education as the band employees, and the band school personnel helped me with other suggested participants. The interest in becoming participants spiraled; more people were interested in telling their stories as I ventured to people's homes and explained my research question.

After I received some names, I asked these individuals if they would be interested in my research. I realized that being a member of the Wahpeton Band would enhance my entry into this community. However, because this is a small reserve, it may also have been a hindrance, because of strong family ties. Therefore, confidentiality needed to be a priority, but also rapport needed to be developed between me and the participants.

When I approached homes on the reserve, I needed to be discreet. The streets that were nonexistent when I was young now included homes that were close together, so it

was obvious which homes I was visiting. Although these streets were labelled with Dakota words to signify the community's history, they somehow reflected the organizational scheme of an urban center. It felt this way because many of the homes I was encountering were close to each other. I could hear people chatting. Children were riding their bicycles down the street, moving quickly from one home to another. I had believed that getting individuals to volunteer in my research as active participants at the band level might have been easier than finding those who were not actively involved at the school. The reason I felt this way was because I knew that many people would realize my family ties with the band council. I felt that the three parents who were not actively involved might not feel comfortable being honest in discussing the band school. This was not so; individuals with divergent backgrounds and experiences graciously offered their time.

I remember summer mornings during the research period when the sun was shining and the air was crisp and warm. As I tend to be a morning person, I came to the reserve at approximately 10 A.M. to begin the day. The peacefulness and serenity that I once felt while exploring in my Koshie's enormous back yard continued to be a part of this current day. However, the yard I encountered was much smaller than I remembered. I approached the first house, but no one was home.

I continued down the street to find my first participant. Teddy was going through a marital separation, so although our first meeting was productive, it was difficult to find subsequent times to meet. When I came to Prince Albert, I ventured out to Teddy's home

on three different occasions, but no one was at home. Eventually, I was able to find a lead to the participant's parents' home. From there I called from Saskatoon to book an interview time. It was approximately a month and a half before the first interview finally took place. Finally, my persistence paid off.

When we did find a place to initiate an interview, this home felt like my Koshie's. The house was set in a beautiful yard, and the individuals inside were as welcoming as with any relative. Though this person was not blood kin, I know in the "Indian world," we were related. Teddy spoke calmly about his life experiences and had many insights to share.

I was invited into another home with a genuine welcome. Sherry asked me to come in, and introduced me to the children. She also asked me if I would like some pop to drink before we began our interview. We had our interview in the kitchen, where we sat by a large kitchen window. Although the decor was current and updated, with colors and furniture that reflected the 1990's, it somehow reminded me of my great-grandmother's home. She would always sit by the window, and when we visited, chairs were around the table. I always loved to look outside to the serenity of country life. I would see the grass swaying in the wind and the birds scooting around in the sky. The kitchen table stood by the window, and though I could see the grass waving, I could also see a house not far away. The band decided to have streets on the reserve. I am not sure why this was done, but somehow it detracted from the feeling of openness and freedom.

The stories shared in this interview reflected back to Sherry's experiences, and

also forward to hope for a better future for her children. The children would come into the kitchen from time to time to ask for refreshments. Then they would leave to watch T.V. in the living room. I commented on how pleasant the decor was in the home. I appreciated the insight this participant shared with me regarding the band school and its environment.

Two interviews took place in the band office, a work environment. The phone would ring and sometimes disrupt the flow of the interviewing process. However, this environment helped me to capture the feeling of what happens in a band office setting. People were coming and going, while others stopped by to visit in the lobby. I heard laughter as young children were reacquainted with each other. As I walked in, a feeling of welcome and association with my family ties overwhelmed me. People that worked there asked how my mother was doing, and though my brother does not have strong ties to the reserve, they asked about him. They reintroduced me to relatives and past students that I had taught in Prince Albert. These students, who would have been approximately ten years old at the time, were now grown women with children of their own.

The overall setting of the band office and school is conducive to community gathering. As you walk in to the board meeting room, to the left is an area with couches and chairs where people may gather or collect their thoughts before they go on. Immediately to the right is the conference room in which the band holds meetings. Directly to the left, attached to the welcoming room, are the band offices where the chief and his assistants deal with the events that typically arise within a reserve setting.

Attached to the conference room is the resource center that has many books and a small computer lab. Dividing the school area from the band offices, conference room and resource center, is a large gym with a kitchen and stage for community events. I had been at the gym for a wake for my uncle's funeral approximately a year and a half previously.

The school is attached to the gym, and from there we moved into the formal school facility for the children of the reserve. There are three classrooms, a couple of offices and areas that may be used for additional educational events. This area is not very large; however, the atmosphere and decor suggest that a lot goes on in this small space. I could tell by the young people's looks that they were excited that I was there. Laughter and humor were always a part of everything I encountered on this small reserve.

One of the interviews took place at my mother's home off the reserve. I feel that these participants needed a place for quietness and reflection on the questions I had previously given them. They too were interested in my mother and what she was doing in her career. Participants shared openly their experiences and views of culture, "total ways of living that are built up by a group of humans and transmitted from one generation to another or from current members to newly admitted members" (Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996, p.607). This was done by narrating their experiences with spirituality, traditional education, formal education and their future aspirations for their children.

As I look back to the interviews, I feel fortunate to have had the opportunity to have these people reflect on their past histories and to envision the future for their children. The interviews were inspirational and contained rich data. And though there



were differences between participants' experiences, there were similarities that gave me insight into what these parents felt was important to their children as cultural and spiritual individuals.

### **Participant descriptions**

There were six participants—including female and male—chosen for this study. Each of the six participants of this study is a member of the Wahpeton Dakota band, and all of them had lived on the reserve for at least four years. Three of the caregivers were continuously involved in their children's education in the band school setting while three parents were not. The term 'caregiver' applied in a traditional sense to four of the participants because they had grandchildren and were responsible for caregiving responsibilities. One individual, who was a single parent, had his/her mother look after the young children a lot of the time.

Their cultural background varied; most of the individuals were of mixed Aboriginal culture—Dakota and Cree; however, the primary cultural background was Dakota. The number of children each participant had varied from nine to four, with the ages of the children ranging from two to twenty-four. Some of their children were attending the band school on the reserve, while others were attending the city schools nearby. The diversity of experiences and home life situations led to data that “allowed participants to define their reality, consider their views about the ideal solution to their problems” to create an inspirational outlook on education as it has evolved to today (Fetterman, 1989, p 126).

Interviews were conducted by using a voice-activated tape machine, while field notes were taken following each interview. This made each narrative accurate, yet the field notes reflected the atmosphere of the setting of each taping (Bogdan & Biklin, 1988). Each interview varied in length from one hour to two hours in length. Interviews were then transcribed by a professional transcriber.

From there I was able to analyze, categorize and reflect on the data that had evolved from these interviews. At the beginning of this process— analyzing the data— I found the data to be overwhelming. I began by reading one narrative at a time, then I read the same narrative a few times. Each time I looked to see how my questions were interwoven with the conversation we had. From these responses, I devised a chart that had each of the participant's names on it with the column titles initially blank. Another chart was used to understand the particulars of the participants. For example, where the participants attended school— residential, rural, urban; what grade each participant succeeded to; if they were currently employed, had they furthered their education, or if they were currently attending school; finally, the number of and ages of the children in their own family. However, as I reread each individual narratives over, I was able to identify general themes. From these themes, I used check marks to acknowledge any patterns that evolved. I highlighted each theme with a different colour, while reviewing the narratives, to see if any other themes evolved with the remaining data. Another chart was made from this chart to redefine my findings. From these data, I developed the larger themes that gave a broader framework for the narratives. The major themes that evolved are: (1) Childhood Learning (2) Resilience (3) Acceptance (4) Vision. These themes

reflect the philosophy of the “Red Road”, because as we journey down this path we can reflect on the experiences we encounter. Each individual has the choice to remain “stuck” or reflect on the experience and move ahead to a more visionary outlook on our experience. Each journey is for each individual to experience in reflective manner; each participant was able to do so with integrity. The sub-themes outlined will introduce the narratives of the participants and will correlate with the major themes in Chapter five.

### **The Participants’ Reflections: A Look to the Past**

*I have a firm belief in the Lakota way of rearing children...we should examine our own value, our own modes of behavior, for we are the “significant others” for children.*

*Beatrice Medicine, Lakota Nation  
Friesen, 1998, p.52*

Researching with my people has allowed me to strengthen a “people’s word.” Conversations with my participants allowed me to explore the meaning of education from an Aboriginal person’s perspective. Wilfred Pelletier, an elder from the Ojibway Nation, acknowledges that “in my experience of Indian decision-making, the important thing is to hear the other guy— have respect for the way he sees it” (Friesen,1998, p. 39). I needed to first understand where my people were coming from. I first asked “as a person of Wahpeton Dakota Reserve, can you tell me what a typical school day was like for you as a young person?” This question led to a series of questions that have always arisen in my mind as an Aboriginal educator. Because participants’ ages ranged widely (20 - 60),

their early experiences varied. However, the reality of an education system imposed on a group of people had profoundly impacted all the individuals who participated in this study.

### **Formal School Setting**

*Unfortunately, the thoughts and feelings of our forefathers, who were treated in such a grievous and insensitive manner by some of those whom they welcomed to share our life, have not been recorded except in our bones.*

*Chief Murray Alexis, Okanagan  
Nation  
Friesen, 1998, p. 8*

Each participant had demands placed upon them in the formal school setting and different expectations when they were in the home environment. Young people had chores to do so the family could collectively function. This learning was “instinctual, continuous, and the most complex of our natural traits” (Cajete, 1994, p. 25). Sherry, who was the youngest I interviewed, talked about how her morning evolved when she woke up.

We used to have to get up at 6:00 every morning. My oldest sister had to make the porridge, and my other sister made the toast. There were eight of us in the house that all went to school at the same time. My two oldest sisters made the breakfast and my oldest brother he chopped the wood.

Then my sister and I had to make all the beds and the other one had to sweep and tidy up. And after breakfast then we all got ready, washed up and then walked about half a mile to wait for our bus. When we got home, we needed to get our homework done and clean up the yard and feed the chickens.

Mary who is older, talks about her typical morning in a residential school. Her experience as a young person did not resemble the childhood freedom that Sherry experienced:

We'd have our chores to do. Then we'd go for supper in the dining room and then we'd come back and we had a small amount of play time and then we were all ready for bed, a shower - not shower, I don't know what you'd call it. It was a big round tub where a spray came in like this and you were washed, but it wasn't a shower, it was something different. Then we'd be in bed. We'd say our prayers.

After supper every day we would kneel and say our rosary. Every day and we'd be on our knees for about an hour every day just saying the rosary. I know the rosary but it doesn't mean anything to me because I had no concept of it when I was growing up. It was useless for me to go through all of that because it meant nothing to me.

The contrast between the two participants' lifestyles reminds us of the time in which Sherry and Mary were raised. Sherry was born into an education system that had evolved over a period of time, while Mary had been taken from her home, so her lifestyle was drastically altered. It was compulsory that all children attend school; this introduced a systematic process of assimilation for Aboriginal peoples.. "From early contact, the schooling that has been provided for Native people had the primary purpose of socialization and acculturation" (Alladin, 1996, p. 27). This assimilation process created an environment that stripped the culture of my people. New experiences were introduced that contradicted their upbringing, and family interaction was disrupted because children were now expected to live away from home so they "could be fixed". Alladin (1996) states that, "the European missionaries and settlers saw the Native people as passive recipients in need of knowledge, training, and direction from a more advanced civilization" (p.27).

Bernice speaks of her childhood in a happier tone as she thinks of her earlier times at home, and then she shares a story about the time she entered residential school.

We would do chores, baby-sit and back then you can say that we did work for our part of the family. We used to go out and chop trees down just to make fire and in the winter time, melt snow. You never see that around now.

Our parents use to take us everywhere they went with a team of horses. They never argued in front of us. They probably had their disagreements but for them to argue right in front of us, that wasn't called for. And they made us happy you know because they really loved us. Those are those years that I cherish.

The first time I ever went to school was at Residential School. We got up in the mornings and prayed and went down for breakfast and hung around for about a half an hour, then we went to school. And in there, we had nuns that were teaching and we got to know our A, B, C's and how to count. Then we'd go for dinner and in the mornings, it must have been about 10:00 or something, we used to watch a TV program, it was called the "The Friendly Giant." Then after dinner we'd go back to school and start writing again. I don't remember having Phys. Ed, only at recess time. And then we'd go back to our girls' side of the residential school and we'd pray again and we'd go in for supper. Then we'd pray again in the evening. Actually, we did a lot of praying.

Aboriginal language, culture, and spirituality were obliterated from this new education system. "Residential schools have had a traumatic impact on Aboriginal children and family life and account for many of today's problems of violence, addiction, loss of culture and loss of self esteem" ( Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1992, p. 3). The children's way of being brought up was ignored while abuse was introduced.

We were always filed. We were always in line. We couldn't just rush; we always had to line up in a file, one behind the other. I remember my number in the school 931 and my sister's was 930. Everything that we owned had our numbers on it and we always dressed the same every day.

I always used to get into trouble. I don't know why. They had me holding my tongue - maybe I said something, I don't know. But they had me sitting there holding my tongue. I don't know what seemed to be a half a day - a day or something. But I couldn't move from them, which was my punishment for what I did. I don't remember doing anything wrong.

Mary

Bernice talks of her experience about language and what would happen.

There was no culture. In school - we couldn't talk our languages there and they used to be some kids that would go and tell the nun - oh this one said something in Cree or you know, and/or else Dene. They had a name for the Dene and I forget what it was and those girls that spoke their language would get punished. They would make them sit in the corner and hold their tongues and some of them would get clackers on the knuckles. I had them a few times on the knuckles.

Bernice also mentions that their self-esteem was robbed from them because of the abuse

that they suffered as young people. A subtle hint of sexual abuse is also mentioned.

I think through the experience with keeping kids on the bus and those nuns, they put down a lot of native girls. Their self-esteem went down. They used to say you're dumb or you don't ever do anything right. But this one girl she's from a reserve down south and I don't know what this nun used to do, but every few days she would take care this girl into her room and close the door, you know. And the next morning that girl would wet her bed and our supervisor was a great big nun - her name was Sister Josephanita. When this girl used to wet her bed, she used to get her face wiped in it. I would think that is why there are so many native people that don't have their self-esteem because it was taken away from them. Also when the residential schools were taking the native children, you know - actually they were taking the responsibility away from the parents. You know how they used to parent. I do think that the parent's responsibility was taken away from them.

Mary acknowledges that the abuse stories were rampant; however, she has chosen not to speak of them.

Today, I often wonder why they called themselves "Helpers of the Lord." You know, and they were the meanest people I ever knew-- the nuns and the priests. There are a lot of stories I know, but I'm not going to get into that today.

On the other hand, one of the participants felt that residential school was a secure place to be, since her home life was not stable. She felt she chose to be there. It is

obvious that the residential school that she attended had been around for a while because she was allowed to go home.

One year my mother put me in residential school, for what reason I don't know. I think to myself that I wanted to go to residential school because I was tired of the family violence. I used to go home on weekends and one weekend I went home and there nobody was around and everything was gone from the house. Nobody told me anything. I went next door to my cousins. I stayed there for the weekend and then when I went back to the school, I talked to the school counselor and I asked him to transfer me to Edmonton. At least I'd see my dad but it wasn't always good to see him because he was drinking. He seemed to be a better father to us when he wasn't with my mom.

Kathy

Residential schools generated a culture of people who had suffered many violations — physical, spiritually, mentally and emotionally. The elder's quote (Murray Alexis) at the beginning of this section speaks to the effects of this era. He notes that these violations were not necessarily overt, but subtly covert in nature. Today, public recognition notes the devastation of the Aboriginal people through imposition of the Euro-Canadian education system.

### **Traditional Education-Acceptance or Denial**

*The creator gave each person a special talent, and if they are in touch with their spirit and know their special work on this earth they will flourish. If people can keep doing what they are supposed to be doing, they can keep on living. People are supposed to support people so they can do what they are supposed to do — to carry out their identity.*

Abbie Brunswick, Paul Band, Cree  
Nation  
Frie  
n, 1998, p. 41

Tom was brought up completely differently from my other participants. Tom was



excluded from formal education process by a father who felt that he would be better off without the Euro-Canadian ways. He was brought up in a very traditional family. Cajete (1994) defines traditional education as “imbued with the perception that all things are sacred from the moment of conception to beyond the moment of death, was learning the true nature of one’s spirit” (p.43). His father was a very traditional and spiritual man.

I have to say that my dad was very traditional. He did healing and he had Sun Dances and also he was a pipe carrier. He had a sweat lodge. He did all the culture and traditions. This is the way he taught us. My grandparents they were involved in - I don’t know if I should say deeply involved, but they were to a certain extent - they really didn't want us to get involved or they didn't suggest that we'd have to go this route through a church. One of my dad's teachings was the way my dad explained to us--he told us that a time there was the church that came about more than 100 years ago, we were just young kids that time. They said the white man brought this from over seas to here and it has nothing to do with us. It's the white man's way of life and to look at ourselves he says we're not white people, we're Dakota people and also part Cree as well. So this is how we are, I mean I took that as because my dad, his teachings. This is how my dad taught us and basically this is how I stick to it.

He remembers his father sharing this dream with him, He also remembers his own childhood:

At a time I used to have nightmares. I'd jump up, start screaming and call for help. But at the same time I don't remember what's going on while I was sleeping, and my dad used to hold me down - not to hold me down, but he'd hang onto me so I wouldn't hurt myself. His fear was that if I was to go to school and fall asleep - and I was on the top bunk in bed - and if that happened to me, then that's quite a drop and I might kill myself or injure myself severely, or something like that. This is what he feared. He didn't want me to go to school. So, I guess that's more or less why he didn't let us go to school. He taught us to stick with our culture.

Teachings were a main force to keep this family on track. It was through the traditional teachings that Tom became familiar with the significance of his culture. He is proud of

who he is:

I pretty well stick to my ways the way I was taught which is the Cree side. I found a lot of respect - not to hurt anybody's feelings, not to speak at anybody or to criticize anybody. This is what I was taught. I was taught nobody is special, everyone is created equal in the Creator's eyes - this is what I was taught and I believe it. Because when I was young I was told to keep my own business and not to offend anybody. And that's exactly what I'm doing. Although I hear a lot of the people criticize others, people doing the same things as what they're doing or don't, sweat lodges and all of that. They claim their ways are a lot better than others. I don't think so. We're all equal, no matter who we are. White people to them have their ways. And they should respect ours and we respect their church. I don't criticize their church. And I don't laugh at them, you know. And I'm proud of who I am, I'm not ashamed a bit of who I am. I'm proud of who I am. I don't want to be a different nationality because I don't fit. I only fit where I was brought up. Where my dad put me and of course the Creator too and I'm proud of my heritage, my culture. Like whatever we get involved in, I'm proud of my wife, I'm proud of my kids, I'm not ashamed.

Tom was the only participant who was able to avoid formal education altogether. This avoidance was encouraged by his father. During the residential school era this was difficult to do, because education was mandatory as a way of accelerating the process of acculturation (Alladin, 1996). To resist this government policy, Tom was encouraged as a young boy to learn the way of his people by not attending formal education. Tom became familiar with the Dakota traditions and felt proud to be who he was. The other participants in this research varied in their knowledge of Aboriginal traditional teachings. For example, Sherry, who was the youngest participant, was discouraged from acknowledging her culture.

No, I didn't know anything about my culture. Well, my dad spoke a little Cree when he wanted to sneak away from the kids. That's the only time we knew they were going to go somewhere. But otherwise, he spoke fluent French. Actually when we were little kids going to town, my dad would say yea we're going to

town to see some Indians. It's like "Yea let's go town to see some Indians, dad!" Like we didn't even know we were Indians!

We never went to pow-wows. My dad called it savaging, basically. He said what they do out there, acting like savages. That's why white people discriminate against these people. He's say they were savages. But after like when he did get sick, he went to the Medicine, he went back to his background, I guess. And then he told us, he explained it was wrong what he did and then you should just kind of try to find out background, find out about our background, go to pow-wows, do things like that for your kids.

Even though Sherry was discouraged from learning her culture, it was not until after her father became ill and he interacted with a Medicine man, that he had encouraged her to learn all she could about the traditions of the Aboriginal people. Mary had similar experiences when she was young.

I had no exposure to it. Whenever there was something going on, well we'd go to Soup Dances - back then like he said we called it Soup Dance where they dance around the fires with their bundles and offer soup to the spirit world. We were told to stay away from those things by my older sisters, my step sisters and my dad. They told us to stay away from those things and they said it was none of our business. That's how I grew up from these traditional things, like because of how I heard this as a kid. Things like this were not my business. So when I met my husband, whenever him and the old man would talk, his grandfather - I'd shy away from everything because I went back to my childhood and they said it was none of my business. We weren't exposed to Sun Dances, sweat lodges, I don't think my dad ever really believed in sweat lodges.

Two other participants were not exposed to traditional teachings. When I asked about traditional cultural teachings both these individuals were vague in their responses.

Language was identified with culture.

But my dad would talk to us in Dakota once in awhile, it wasn't very often. But my mom used to talk to us in Cree. I understand more Cree than Dakota. I mean just because it was spoken to us.

Bernice

We had already lost our language. My dad had the understanding that he wanted us to succeed in the white world, so they never taught us our language.

Kathy

There was a hint that their parents felt that culture and language were to be avoided because they wanted their children to survive in the Euro-Canadian education system.

However, there was a young participant in his twenties who was brought up in both worlds. Teddy had a firm traditional upbringing and attended school in an both a rural and urban setting in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan.

There was a lot of traditional teachings. I went to pow-wows with my aunties, and my grandmas. Every year I go to a Sun Dance in which I have to participate. My kids and me. We do that every year.

I just try to make my son's future a little bit better than mine. I teach them the same thing that my mom taught me. We go to pow-wows and I teach them that one day they're going to have to take over that thing for me.

My mom used to do my preparation for the Sundance until I was 21 and I had my first child. Then I was told that I had to take over, so I took over. My family has been actively involved throughout most of my life. I've been traveling to places like B.C. I've seen the States more than a few times thanks to my dad, it's usually my dad that takes me.

The participants' experiences with traditional education varied from person to person. Some viewed Aboriginal culture and traditional teachings as ceremonies, stories, dreams, languages and experiences taught to them by family members. Others did not have an opportunity to learn their culture because of outside influences, and some parents chose not to expose their children to traditions. Each individual had to adapt to their parents' perspective on traditional knowledge and the significance that they placed upon it. This knowledge would later influence their own outlook on their self-esteem and

acceptance of identity.

The traditional education process encouraged the children to be reflective while experiencing life long lessons. These teachings reflected the medicine wheel teachings. Each component of the medicine wheel– emotional, spiritual, mentally, physically– needed to be connected in order for a healthy spirit to transpire. The participants who were taught traditionally would have had those members of the immediate family as well as the community to celebrate these traditions. This guidance would reflect the Red Road philosophy of life-long learning.

### **Racism- Institutional, Overt and Covert**

*All men were made by the same Great Spirit Chief. They are all brothers. The earth is the mother of all people, and all people should have equal rights upon it.*

*Chief Joseph, Nez Perce Nation*

*Freisen, 1998, p. 45*

In an utopian world, equality would be a word that would not need to be defined and the concept of racial difference would be one of respect. This study shows that racism was apparent in all the participants' lives. Institutional racism was both unintentional and intentional. Miller-Cleary & Peacock (1998) define institutional racism as "the conscious and unconscious exclusion from the curriculum of American Indian History, culture, languages, literature, and other instruction relevant to these student's lives" ( p. 69). Mary talks about her first experience in a residential school, which was the introduction of formal education for some.

I remember that first day I went to the residential school and the change that happened to me. I used to have long hair. They cut it above my ears. I didn't know what I was doing there. I remember being very lonesome. The thing that sticks out in my mind is the smell of an apple and that apple is still in my mind. When I smell an apple, I automatically go back to that day. I remember that smell of our first night at the residential school how scared I was. And I remember all I could see was a black - it must have been a nun, a person dressed in black and from that day on I knew it was a place that I didn't want to be, but I was forced to be there. I didn't understand guess the religious aspect of the residential school and how the prayers and everything we had to learn - it meant nothing to me at the time. And yet I knew I had to do it.

Bernice also acknowledged the punishment those received that spoke their language.

These two experiences reflect a system that was unfamiliar and negated their own cultural traditions. Not recognizing the significance of why these two were in residential school created a memory that would not be forgotten. Difficulty entering the school system is apparent now through Mary's reflection.

That's one thing that I can say is that there's a lot of parents that are involved in their children's schooling in the community. Once they reach inside then it's a different story. I worked with students attending here as well as P.A. and a lot of the times I still can't walk through those doors and feel comfortable. Even the high school, I can't go and feel comfortable. I can relate to what the children are feeling in those city schools. But even I can't.

All of these people felt the impact of racism. All the experiences deeply impacted the individual's decision to remain in school and whether some would want to identify with their culture. Various recollections were shared by all the participants. These were acts of overt and covert racism: "Overt racism is up-front in your face racism. Covert racism is often disguised and difficult to measure" (Cleary & Peacock, 1998, p. 70).

I had a very low self-esteem at the time, I was embarrassed of who I was - being Indian. I really didn't have any motivation for school. I was always ashamed of who I was.

It could be from just living on a reserve, coming into - yea that's right too.

I did attend a school outside of Alexander - it was a white school because the band school only went up to grade 6. So when we were in grade 7, because we were moving around lots, you know to many different schools. And at that time we went to the nearest town from Alexander and there was a lot of white kids there and they were - they used to call the native children down. So we kind of just more or less stuck to ourselves and even then I wasn't happy because the names that had been called to us. I think that's where, possibly all that shame came from.

Mary

Teddy, who like Sherry is one of the younger participants, spoke of the racism he felt daily as if it was part of his day, like brushing his teeth.

I faced racism constantly. You always got called down "wagon burner", and all that. I would go down to Packard and go to school - get in a fight at recess with the White kids because there was always a group of Indians and a group of white kids there. Then I would come home, do my chores and then go play.

There was not any support by the administrators or discussion on what happened regarding the fighting.

I used to see the principal all the time just for fighting. He'd give me the strap. That went on for I'd say it didn't change until Sarong High School. I went to Perou getting the strap too, from them.

Teddy

The lack of administration support for this individual caused him to quit school. A student who had an extremely high academic average and who is currently in his twenties says:

I went up to grade 11. In Sarong, I did face the same thing but I was older then so I was able to hold my own a little better. Until one day when I walked into this one classroom and it was all whites, pure white, it was a work shop class that I was in. I sat and those white guys called me down and I didn't mind them. I just kept on doing my books and classes and then the teacher walked in and looked over the classroom and he saw one Indian, and started picking on me. I told him you can't do that. He said something about it and he made a joke, so I just picked up my books and I walked out. He said he was going to tell the principal on me so I come walking down. The principal chased me, my guidance counselor chased me as well. I opened my locker and I threw my books and I told them that's it. I'm done. I'm out of here. I quit. That was it, I couldn't do it anymore. I was a 97 average student.

On the other hand, Sherry, one of the youngest participants who was lighter skinned, did not face racism as a young person. However, she does talk about how her siblings faced extreme racism and the repercussions they faced because of this.

It was good for me because I was fair skinned; I blended in with the white kids. As for my sister, it didn't work out that well. She ended up dropping out of school at a young age. She was only 12 years old and she just finally said no more school. The students were mean to her.

It was because she was native - and since I was so fluent with French, I just went through the schools easily.

We started off in Pildeau, SK. They were really good towards us, but they were really mean towards the native kids because of our principal. The principal was really racist. He was very racist. There was my sister and I. The two of us got into a fight with these two little white girls. The three of us got five straps each. My sister got ten straps on each hand and she wasn't even doing anything. All she was doing was arguing. I was the one that was fighting for her. So she got the worst end of the stick.

My brother got into a fight with this white kid, and that principal manhandled him right to the ground - choked him, then threw him down to the floor, and smashed his face into the floor. My sister Ruby grabbed the principal and she started hitting him, like she was a pretty big, big, girl and she beat up the principal.



Dennis saw and he knew my brother. He stopped Ruby. Mr. Yo was going to hit my brother and Dennis grabbed him and hit him, so we got rid of him eventually.

After, we moved from the reserve to the city. It was easier on me than my sister. I felt sorry for her. She was called names and had eggs thrown at her. Her locker was vandalized. They were really mean to her.

Sherry

Eventually, Sherry began to deny her "Indianness" because she wanted to be accepted by her peers at the expense of her sister's humility.

I got my grade 11 and that was it. I got pregnant. I got pregnant with my girl. I was treated really nicely. You know and everybody talked about racism. I seen it and it was to the point where it was getting into my head that I wasn't native, I was white. Active white and I used to treat my sister mean too. My dad would say to me, that it's not right what you're trying to do. He said "you're not fully Indian and you're not fully white - so you're a half-breed." He basically said I want you to do is stand up for your Indian Rights. So I was like, okay. Because I was confused. Because I was accepted and she wasn't. She was darker, I was fair. I dyed my hair, she never.

Sherry did not face racism until she got into the higher grades. She was placed in a system that ignored her rights as a student because it was understood by this system that it was the Federal government's responsibility to look after her, as an Aboriginal person.

I just said no, I can't go to school because they made fun of me. They discriminated against me because I was pregnant and they found out I was native. After that they closed the doors on me. But before they found out I was native, they gave me a lot of free advice. Free housing if I needed it if my parents kicked me out - they were going to give me free housing.

The school helped out the white girls like that and then as soon as they found out. They took care of the doctor's bills, too. It was a young mother's thing they had in Plat Rue. Then when I said well no I'm covered, I'm a Status Indian - that was

it. Everything was basically taken away, it was like my counseling was gone and prenatal classes were taken away.

The two individuals who attended residential school had similar experiences at a formal day school that opened near their reserve.

My experience at the day school really was terrible. Terrible. We used to ride on the rural school division school bus, and we were the only ones again out of the reserve attending this school. We got into a lot of fights right from morning when we hit the bus until we got back on the bus. Almost on a daily basis. One of us would be fighting with one of the, well the other children and there was a lot of it was racism. That was something that we were never, ever, had no contact with at all. As soon as we got into the door, we were fist fighting with somebody and a lot of it was just protecting ourselves. We weren't bad kids. The principal at the time, I found him very racist. He'd always find something wrong with our family. You know, whether it was our lunches or our clothes, or something, he'd always find something to complain about.

Mary

I was there for grade 4, 5, and 6 and that's when I moved back - well I didn't move back but during that time my mom and dad broke up and I left School and I went to start living with my mom and she had put us to school in town. And right away I felt that the difference between Packard School and the school in town. There was a lot of racism at Packard.

Bernice

Even though these individuals faced racism daily there was a particular incident in high school that caused Mary to quit school.

Finally, I just quit school at the beginning of grade nine. I remember my mom she was upset that I had quit. She told me you're not going to hang around here. I had moved to Saskatoon in grade 9 - that was the change. And I went into grade nine. That's the thing. It was racist at this school.

I enjoyed my classes; I enjoyed my school there. However, I didn't like the racist things that were going on. One thing that sticks out in my mind and that's why I quit grade nine. There were these two guys in grade nine, in the same class as I

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I enjoyed my classes; I enjoyed my school there. However, I didn't like the racist things that were going on. One thing that sticks out in my mind and that's why I quit grade nine. There were these two guys in grade nine, in the same class as I

was in. They'd always sit behind me and they would chant stuff like "squaw woman" and "you belong in the bush." I couldn't tell anybody because I felt that I was distant from the teachers. The teachers only taught. This is where you moved from class to class and they just taught.

But that one day they sharpened a pencil really sharp and one guy poked me on the back and the other guy did the same thing on the side. Finally, that one guy stabbed me in the back with a pencil, a sharp pencil and I just got up and grabbed my book and slammed it on his face and I broke his nose. I walked out and never went back. I ended up not going back and that was sad because I enjoyed going to school. Then I ended up hanging around with the wrong friends and they started drinking, but we had moved back to P.A. now with my mom. By then I still wasn't in school, it was going on into October, November and I still wasn't in school.

Mary's situation became the catalyst that discouraged her from continuing school. While

Bernice felt that there was a difference between the city school and the rural school

because this rural school had a small population of Aboriginal students.

I think maybe because the city schools had more experience with native children, you know they grew up with these kids. In town it was so easy. I really liked going to school everyday. That was a big difference. And I used to go to school everyday.

When the opportunity arose for these young people to feel acceptance, they enjoyed school. However, this is more evident in the participants' children's lives that we will see with future narratives.

Racism was prevalent in all these individuals' lives. As young people, the participants encountered devastating experiences at early age; racism contributed to their leaving school. Of course, there were other factors that may have assisted with these decisions— pregnancy, movement from one city to another, family instability, and

poverty within the family. Introduction of the formal education process has been compared to a cultural genocide of a people (Alladin, 1996).

You know sometimes you'd miss your bus and you couldn't go then. And if my dad didn't have any lunch for us, he wouldn't send us because there was a whole bunch of us. There were times he couldn't afford any lunch for us. I didn't like it there at all because of all the fights we'd get into.

We had some family problems and already my other family were moving into town with my mom. My dad and my mom had been separated for many years already.

Kathy

Then my mom had moved back and she was still there and I was still at a boarding home in Prince Albert. But those are my teen years and I just fooled around, you know. But probably if I would have had my mom beside me or my dad, you know to push, push, push. Then the support would have been there. But my dad was living out here and my mom in Saskatoon, you know.

Bernice

One day, my parents split up and we were just tossed all over to my older sisters place which was no better, because it was still - everybody was still drinking. And finally one day when my mom left. I ended up going back with her to Hobema, it was a residential school and we kind of had it a bit rough, being new kids there. Rough kids, we kind of ran into a few bullies. My parent split again and I moved into the city with my mom.

When we were in grade 7, because we were moving around a lot to many different schools.

Mary

However, the resilience to recover from a turbulent childhood allowed these individuals to move forward in their lives and to view their past experiences in light of what they want for their children's future. All five of the participants had quit school before completing grade twelve, while one individual did not attend formal schooling. Three of the five participants have gone back to school and have received their grade twelve; one

individual is currently working on a degree; and the other participant who had an academic average of 97%, is thinking of returning to school. All these individuals are currently employed, except the person who is working on her degree. As caregivers they love their children, however, I speculate that they struggle with how to parent because of their own educational experiences. Rather than a feeling of bitterness I sensed acceptance of the education system that had been imposed on them.

### **Involvement in Formal Schooling and Traditional Education**

*The Indian needs no writings; words that are true sink deep into his heart where they remain.*

*Four Guns, Oglala Sioux Nation  
Friesen, 1998, p. 53*

The Federal government introduced the Euro-Canadian formal education system to Aboriginal peoples, and in this study it had been a part of all but one of the participants' lives. Cajete (1994) acknowledges that "cultures evolve, adapt, and react in response to ever-changing internal and external environmental factors" (p.165). This can be seen in the resilience and acceptance of people who were historically discouraged from practising their culture. "Native people were told that their ancestors were savages, their religion was pagan, their language was primitive, and the only way they could become truly human was to adopt the Whiteman's ways" (Alladin, 1996, p. 33). However, the "traditional education process"—that is sometimes assumed that all Aboriginal people have been a part of—may have or may not have been part of the participants' family's upbringing. What were their hopes and dreams for their children and how does formal

and traditional education fit into the lives of the young people? This section will focus on the narratives of the parents regarding education in the present, and the future.

### **Formal Education as Important**

*Take the best of the white man's road, pick it up and take it with you. That which is bad, leave it alone, cast it aside. Take the best of the Indian ways — always keep them. They have been proven for thousands of years. Do not let them die.*

*Chief Sitting Bull, Hunkpapa Teton-Sioux*

*Friesen, 1998, p. 59*

All the participants felt that education was important. Formal education was viewed as a tool to future endeavours; they saw it as important for their children to compete for employment opportunities. Sherry hoped that her children would not view social assistance as a way out. She wanted her children to have ample opportunities in life that will be available to them through education:

I really find that it is important for them to have their education because I look at some kids and they say I do not want to go to school because there is always social assistance. I always tell my kids it is not going to be there. It is not going to be there. There can be no more hand outs. You need your education, get a good job and this way you do not have to worry. I worry about my kids getting their education.

Sherry

Teddy already had aspirations for his children to attend university and to get employment with his degree.

My oldest already knows that if he wants a good job he's got to get high up in school. I told him, see if you can beat your dad, what your dad had at school. He said no problem, he will be in second year university over here, so hopefully he'll catch up and pass.

Teddy

Education is seen as an agent to assist their children to have a better future. Bernice, Tom and Kathy see the relevance of education as a strategy for employment, but also tie in the significance of the cultural component.

I think education is very, very important - very important so that you can get into a field where you choose, you know and not for where somewhere else is going to send you.

I'm trying to make them be - to be able to understand themselves and others through the Spiritual, Emotional, and Mental, and Physical components of the medicine wheel. So they don't choose the same kind of life that I chose. I try and give them tools as I can and not to choose the wrong way. But when they're older, I can't do anything.

Bernice

Tom was the individual who did not attend school, however, his thoughts are similar to the others. He speaks of his gift, which is to teach his children the traditional component of education.

Well coming from a culture side, I guess that was my part and this is what I was taught. I teach my kids what my dad taught me, well they pretty well understand the sweat lodges, Sun Dances, and just pow-wow - they just love their culture. But to survive I guess I'll have to agree that they need education. But at the same time, as long as they hang on to their culture ways they shouldn't have any problem. Because we thought, it's just like they're trying to go across the river with no boat, it's pretty difficult to have no boat and cross. You need that support. That's my opinion.

Tom

I also think that education is important and for their survival in the future, should things not turn out for them when they, you know get out on their own and all



that. At least they have this as an asset, to do something that - a tool to help them survive, if they're lucky.

If they're lucky enough to find anything. But I've always told them, you know and it is hard to help your own children. But I always try to remind them that, just like me you can do anything in your life but never forget the native spirituality.

Kathy

Mary speaks of what she hopes for her children through her narrative. She hopes to achieve this as a parent who is involved by being there for them.

Well for my children, I want them to be successful. They don't have to be a doctor or a lawyer, you know. But their education and what I'm teaching them at home as a parent I hope that it will offer them that they can do anything they want. If they reach their goal, I think that I will have achieved something as a parent.

Kathy

All of these parent expressed not only the importance of education, but also expressed their need to be there for their children. Education appears to be a twofold process for most of the participants. It not only involves the process of what happens in the classroom; it also involves the parent at home. This involvement at home may be helping with homework, making sure there is reading time, asking how their day was, or coming into the city to see his children when he can.

When they get home I ask them how their day was.

My son comes home with a reading book every evening, so every evening he's has to read. He reads to all of us. He gets the kids to sit down in front of him, as well as me to sit there and he reads to all of us. He gets the skills of talking in front of a group and he gets his reading skills at the same time.

I try to get involved, but I do not have a vehicle right now so I don't usually go to those extra-curricular days. But during the day if I have a chance to I will. Like last week here they had - Michael's classroom had Stone Soup they call it. At lunch - I showed up there, I had Stone Soup with them.

Every once in awhile, I pop into one of their classrooms and take a bunch of cookies or something, just for them to, eat and most of the time I'm able to make it in for parent teacher interviews.

Teddy

Kathy has children in the band school and she reflects her day after the school is done.

My daughter goes to the band school. She has gone to this school all of her life. I never worried about them and they'd be happy, they'd talk about what they had done, the homework they had - they'd do their homework. You know and I think when they had problems I was able to help them with their homework, sometimes, except Math I'm not good in Math. With all their other work, I was able to help them, it was kind of like a family thing.

Sherry speaks of her involvement at home by encouraging reading as well as ensuring

they have a healthy lifestyle.

They do reading. They do a lot of reading at home after school. At least an hour of reading. And then it will be supper time and then I'll give them an hour of play time and they come in, 8:00 bedtime. I think children need their rest to learn. If they don't have a good breakfast, well they don't learn.

Another important aspect of traditional education that is taught at home is the cultural component. Kathy sums up her view by expressing her view of formal education and traditional education.

I see it two ways. For this life, education will benefit them if they use it right, like you know in terms of survival. Education the other way will help them when you know, they get themselves ready for their time, when it's their time to go. You know, because we're all going to go one day. I always tell them that. You have to free yourself of garbage when you leave, otherwise you suffer when you're gone.

Mary

This statement supports the need for both formal education and traditional education within their young people's lives. Although some parents felt comfortable teaching their children traditional cultural education, others did not feel comfortable doing this. Therefore, they depended on the community and band school to expose their children to this knowledge. The decision to place their children in a band school situation or an urban setting reflects the desired wants for their children.

### **Band School or Urban School?**

The decision to send the children to either the band school or the urban schools depended on the needs of the parents. Historically, band schools were initiated in 1972 by the National Indian Brotherhood of Canada because of the deplorable conditions that children had to encounter in the Euro-Canadian system, primarily in Residential Schools (Indian Control of Education, 1972). Some parents I interviewed were concerned about relearning the culture and language of the Dakota people. The band school was built in 1979 and the first school began in a tipi. Mary spoke about the school's history:

They first built a school area and then they built the front area. They did not have a gym for about a year or two years, it was just plain dirt in the middle of all. I believe they moved in there in 1981. They had no gym. There was a library and two classrooms and a staff room, that was the extent of their school. By this time the enrollment increased to about 30 students. It was bringing in a lot of kids out to the school. We wanted something better for our children, for our kids.

Inspired by wanting something better for their children, the school committee initiated programming that was not available in the urban setting. Their goal was to have strong cultural and academic programming.

The cultural component was strong. They wanted to go that way when they first started to build that school. They wanted to teach the language; they wanted to teach the culture. In 1988, they started our dance troupe and a lot of it, there was the song. People learned the language from the song, and they learned how to discipline themselves through the dance because we do shows for people and we try and teach them good behavior when they're in a cultural event - their behavior has to be so disciplined, you know. Just when we're doing a show we don't want them running around when it's not their turn to dance. They know what to do. They are very disciplined and they help each other. The older ones help the little ones. My son was in the dance troupe when he was in grade 1, 2, and now he's working with us, with this dance troupe. In fact, we have our singers; they started from the school.

We're grasping at everything just to try to keep it within our family. Because I think that the community is doing lots for the language, they're doing a lot. But we need to start at home.

Mary

One other program— Head Start Program— was initiated for the younger children. Head Start program was initiated to help pre-schoolers enter school with skills that would encourage school success.

Actually there's three staff and one cook. I have the daycare and there's the Head Start instructor, and I'm glad that they allowed elders to talk about what it used to be like here and that's where they begin Dakota language.

Bernice

Programs are initiated to encourage the young people to learn about their culture. Learning their ancestral language is very important to most of the participants. For three of the parents, learning the Dakota language was the component of the band school that enticed them to send their children to the band school, rather than sending them to the city.

The reason why I want them there is to pick up their Dakota language.

Tom

But I want her to go in here until grade 6 to learn the Dakota language.

Sherry

Tom and Kathy felt that the band school would give their children a basis in Dakota language. The school's role was important because they felt as parents that they were lacking skills in this area.

I told the kids - my language is only about 65% - or maybe 75% - you guys know more. I talk Dakota to them and they just look at me. They don't understand what I'm talking about. I lost quite a bit of that language. In a span of about 36 years, so that's a quite a span if you don't use that language. Simple little words, all those little simple words. And to put a sentence together to try and tell a story, I can't do that. I need to go back into the old people.

Tom

We still need to develop our language. You know I can say a lot of the words. But I can't make sentences, you know. As far as "aday, enuh", you know I know what they mean. I know some of the words. There are tapes coming out. At home we're involved, I get them involved in all cultural things. I think it's important now. Now I realize that. I should have realized that a long time ago, but there can't be should have's.

Mary

Knowing one's language was the firm basis of understanding one's culture; this was obvious from the narratives shared by the participants:

The way I teach my kids is that you're born with a culture and traditions. Therefore, you have to learn that language, it goes together. Because when we're at pipe ceremonies, you have to speak your own language to communicate the spiritual way with your language.

What about in the future, supposing these kids are going to their own sweat lodges and Sun Dances and what not, pipe carriers, are they going to start talking the spiritual component the English way? You know and that's pretty uncomfortable, and that's where we're at right now. That's why it's very important for my kids to speak this language so they can communicate the spiritual way into their own

language. And that's what we're told. And every time we go to a sweat, we pray in our own language - whether it's in Dene, or Dakota, or Lakota, or Cree or Sarcee, or whatever - on and on and as long as you use your language. Same as the white people too - there's German, so many different nationalities, they speak different languages. And that's where we are too in that area, First Nation people, the difference of so many tribes. And they all have their own cultures too, and I respect that.

Tom

Language is important because it puts more meaning into words, you know. And you understand it better, it becomes more clear as to - well look at that one there. The name of the clinic. They had their grand opening and what it means is "place of memories" for the past healers you know and that's the name of that health clinic.

It gives you a better understanding. I can relate to them when they say now even "oyatey" the word, we've never heard that before. Now you're looking at it and you know it's the people. And the people is not only you. The people is everybody. You know, even that says - it puts you closer as a community.

Mary

My children need to know their language because they're living on a Dakota, well a Sioux reserve. I regret not knowing my own language. I always blame my parents. So this way if I give her that opportunity to learn the Dakota language, then she won't have any regrets.

Sherry

Language is important because it opens doors for you. If you go down to North Dakota and you talk Sioux to them they get to know you. And then if you talk Cree to them, they get to know you there. Then you may talk to a white man, a business white man, that's all connected - it's just that they all talk different languages. That's where language comes in. You're not cut off from anybody.

Language is important to be able to connect with other peoples' worlds. I feel that it's the main basis, you can get along with everybody that way. All breeds of Indians, you can get along with them.

If you do not have that connection you miss out. You miss out on your heritage, that's one thing for sure that you miss. You won't know what these guys are talking about

Teddy

One parent expressed her son's interest in attending the band school may be because of

the connection to the language.

Maybe the closeness of his friends, you know. And he's really good in the Dakota language. Oh, he can read that dictionary so good.

Bernice

Overall, all of the participants expressed their aspiration for the Dakota language to be taught to their young people. Mary summarizes her wishes for her community by hoping that the whole community will eventually be fluent in their language.

In my lifetime, I hope that everybody is fluent and talking their language and keeping it sacred. We just about lost it. But thanks to the ones, the older people, thanks to them that it has happened. The Dakota language was one of the languages, on this survey they took, that it said was going to be extinct. We can't let that happen. The Dakota language is part of us. I can understand that now, I can see that, you know. A lot of times I used to get offended when they used to say, you're not an Indian until you know your language. I said well I consider myself an Indian and I don't know my language. But now, I'm beginning to understand; now, that I know some of the language.

Mary

Even though the Wahpeton Band School offers a Dakota language component as part of the curriculum, it is noted by this participant that the family needs to be part of this process.

We're grasping at everything just to try to keep it within our family. Because I think that the community is doing lots for the language, they're doing a lot. But we need to start at home.

Mary

## **Culture at School and Culture at Home?**

The passing on of one component of culture to the children was evident in the teaching of the Dakota language. However, the practice of reinforcing one's language at home was not realistic for four of five participants, because they did not know their language or spoke very little of it. However, they felt that it was important for their children to understand and speak Dakota. The other cultural teachings that took place at school, to some extent were reinforced at home. The participants encouraged their children to become involved in ceremonies and other cultural teachings. These parents assisted in the process of cultural teachings by supporting their children's learning, and a lot of this ability to support depended on their own past experiences. Mary was the only individual who recognized the cultural component within the band school.

The cultural component was strong. They wanted to go that way when they first started to build that school. They wanted to teach the language; they wanted to teach the culture. It was kept that strong within our school. In 1988, we started our dance troupe and a lot of it, there was the song. People learned the language from the song, and they learned how to discipline themselves through the dance because we do shows for people and we try and teach them good behavior when they're in a cultural event. Their behavior has to be so disciplined. They know what to do. They are very disciplined and they help each other. The older ones help the little ones. My son was in the dance troupe when he was in grade 1, 2, and now he's working with us, with this dance troupe. In fact, we have our singers; they started from the school.

On the other hand, Bernice expressed her gratitude for the education offered at the band school. Even though her son is having a difficult time in the everyday life he faces, he is able to somehow get back on track because of his teachings.



My oldest one is having a tough time. He's having a tough time. There's a few times when he has said, "It's hard to be a Dakota." From this statement I know that he picked up quite a bit and when he wants to go do something else, you know just like that thing comes inside of him, you know he has a hard time to choose. But I'm really thankful that he has learned a lot since he was going to school here. I never learned that until my later years. Maybe that was one of the reasons why it kind of went the other way, you know. And with him, I heard him tell me that twice that it's hard to be a Dakota because I feel that why he said that is that he has learned quite a bit of stuff and not only for himself but with respecting himself and others.

And that's what they had when they went into our school and also through Sun Dances, Round Dances, Sweats. You know, my oldest boy was right in there this summer you know helping out, singing. And just before he left to town he told me it's hard to be a Dakota.

Bernice

The one participant whose children went to school in the city said that language could be included in his children's education.

By trying to get them to speak their language. I run into younger people and when I speak Cree or Dakota, they don't understand. Just English, that's the straight basic that they've got is English. Then they're shut off from everybody else.

Teddy

The band school offered some aspects of the cultural components— language. But it was the wish of one of the parents that the band school would offer consistency with the traditional way language was taught and the contemporary Dakota language that their young people learned.

I want them teaching some of our ways. The language is mainly what I want the children to pick up. Then we need better qualified people that speak that language. Not the language that for example for an animal they call it different, and this is how our school is. And what we were taught, as my dad would call it a bear and this other teaching is totally different. So there's a confusion here somewhere.

Tom

Teddy's children attended the urban school system and it was his desire to have language taught in this system.

Aboriginal culture was an important component of education for all of the participants. Valdez (1996) acknowledges Euro-schools as reinforcers of the predominant culture and recognizes its failure to legitimize minority cultures as important contributors (p.18). Four participants expressed their desire for the band school to continue with traditional teachings.

What I would like to see is to be taught half and half. Half white people and half our traditions by qualified teachers to be there—the people that understand their culture. Not the people that they pick up a book and then they seem to know more about it. And I know we'll have a lot - of "popcorn elders." But that's what I like to see and the second language too they should have been other, although we have a lot of sects - a lot of languages. That's what I'd like to see for example, a morning class maybe a Cree class or a Dakota or whatever it is What's involved with the everyday life and how to survive.

There is a two way survival and there's a lot of people that look it, well my wife here does anyway, education is the most important thing in the world. You cannot survive without that. Again, I reject that because you can survive the other way like tanning hides and doing all kinds of costumes. That's my opinion, we should be taught half and half.

Tom

We have six children. Mostly, they went to city schools. But we've tried to send them to native schools in the city. Where they have perhaps something native in their curriculum whether it's just the language. The older kids they used to have in Edmonton something called the sacred circle. They used to go to the schools and smudge and teach the kids about sweet grass and things like that. Then they'd have a year end pow-wow, right in their school yard, amongst the white neighborhood.

What I'd like to see is educating children in terms of protocols to everything, approaching an elder, whatever traditions we have like Sun Dance, sweat lodges - teaching them protocols so this way they learn and then they teach their kids.

Kathy

In 1954, was the last Sun Dance on the reserve. It was put on by Aunty Rose Buffalo, that's what I heard. Now this was their third year. That Sun Dance is back. Our Dakota culture is back. It started off slow, but our beliefs and that are becoming strengthened. I think a lot of it is because we wanted the buffalo back. Our past chief wanted to put the culture back into our community because it's so strong, so beautiful, you know, just looking at it, how the Dakota beliefs are so important- when you're looking at the Seven Council fires, it means a lot. When you're looking at the sweats, it means a lot. The Sun Dances that came back

means a lot to me. That's my spirituality that I was missing back then when I was on my knees praying with hands like this. Now I feel it inside. But that spiritual part we have to teach to our kids now so they can have that spirit. You know it took me 43 years to realize this.

Mary

The only thing that I could think of that was so different is that there's more culture in our school, you know. Although and the other schools are now trying you know, they have Aboriginal day.

Bernice

Mary expresses her desire to see education as a holistic process, not a secular event in her childrens' lives.

I see it two ways. For this life, education will benefit them if they use it right, like you know in terms of survival. Education the other way will help them when you know, they get themselves ready for their time, when it's their time to go. You know, because we're all going to go one day. I always tell them that. You have to free yourself of garbage when you leave, otherwise you suffer when you're gone.

Mary

The traditional teachings of culture—which includes ceremonies, traditions, protocols,

and language— were significant to the participants. Education was considered to be a holistic process rather than a secular entity. And although “formal education” was seen as a valuable tool, so their children would have choice when they arrived to adulthood, it was equally significant that culture was incorporated into their daily schooling. Overall, all the parents hoped that their children would have the ability to survive and obtain success. Success meant having “all of the tools” to make it in the continuously changing world we now live in.

By having all of the tools, as expressed previously through the narratives, The participants thought it was important for the children to have the best academic advantages as their partners had in the city schools. Four of the participants felt that the band school needed to focus on academic quality as well. Primarily, all of the four expressed the need for quality teachers who aspired for high expectations of their children. Sherry, Teddy, Tom and Mary shared these comments:

Well to me anyway I still believe we go to one school and you learn a lot more than we do because some of these teachers back in Wahpeton, I guess they're not really qualified to teach.

Tom

I find that they're learning a lot slower. They don't push their students as hard as we were pushed. My oldest learned a lot more in the city school than she did out here. When we moved out here she said "Oh mom, this is easy." So I asked the teachers to give her more work and push it. They said they couldn't do that.

They then explained because the books can't leave the school and I always liked homework. I wanted for them to come home with homework to have that work study at home as well as at school. And library books, they cannot take them from the school.

Sherry

Teddy expressed his view about the city schools. He appeared to think that his children were further ahead than he was at that age.

They're a lot smarter, they're learning a lot faster than what I used to. For example, I didn't get into adding until about grade 2. My son has already done it in grade 1. They're already way ahead of me, past my grade. These ones are a lot smarter than what I was. I noticed that my oldest there he acts like an adult sometimes.

He did not express his views towards the band school; however, he spoke of the lack of band support for his children in the urban setting.

My family is not supported from the band. This is all done by us. If they want money, we ship them off, for whatever trip they're waiting for. It's all done like that.

Not from these guys, no. I don't think it will ever change, there's still big families on reserves as you know. Those are the ones that fight for most of the money, so. We're probably not going to be able to change that until all of us have kids.

Sherry needed to have support when voicing concerns. She felt that if a conversation did emerge to challenge the school's protocol on a particular issue, it was believed that these views may be taken personally and animosity may result.

Within the school setting the teachers run, they have their favorites. I don't like that because some are bullies but they're never disciplined. Or they're too scared of the parents to go and talk with the parents. They just don't want, I guess the grief, I guess, to deal with it.

No. I tried talking and that and it didn't work out. I said it's not just one person view, you've got to listen to both sides of the story. You can't just take one side. I should have shut my mouth.

Four of the participants expressed their concerns about certain aspects of the band school.

Three of the individuals shared information pertaining to suggestions of nepotism. It was the wish of these participants that their concerns be heard. Two individuals were concerned about the job descriptions of administration and their responsibility to fulfill this professional role. Although concerns with the band school were expressed openly, the primary concern of the participants was how their children could receive the best education possible. These expectations varied somewhat, but the desired outcome was the same for all of the participants. These similarities were expressed by all the participants in these narratives.

Well coming from a culture side, well I guess that was my part and this is what I got taught. I teach my kids what my dad taught me, well they pretty well understand the sweat lodges, Sun Dances, and just pow-wow - they just love their culture. But to survive I guess I'll have to agree that they need education. But at the same time, as long as they hang on to their culture ways they shouldn't have any problem. Because we thought that I guess it's just like they're trying to go across the river with no boat, it's pretty difficult to have no boat and cross. So you need that support. That's my opinion.

Tom

I hope they achieve their goals, like what they set out for themselves, you know. I can't be there like I said to watch them, you know and just hope that they make the right choices with all the tools that they have now.

Bernice

I hope they have good sturdy families. I hope they get higher education. I hope they are able to communicate with white people and work in the white man's world. And just for them to come and visit me once in awhile. That's about it.

Teddy

I think that education is important and for their survival in the future, should things not turn out for them when they get out on their own. At least they have this as an asset, to do something that - a tool to help them survive, if they're lucky. If they're lucky enough to find anything. But I've always told them, you know and

it is hard to help your own children. But I always try to remind them that, just like me you can do anything in your life but never forget the native spirituality.

Mary

I just want them to finish school and get a good paying job out there. Like my son said, "Oh mom I don't want to finish school, I want to work with dad. Well no, I don't want that. Dad has to work hard for his money and they say well, can't we work like you?" And I say, "well sometimes mom doesn't have work, and then I get really crusty," I said this way I said, "you guarantee your job for life," I said. "It's your choice, you're going to always have that job and you can retire and they says well what's retire? I said 55 you could quit working and live off this money you built up."

Sherry

I want them to be successful. They don't have to be a doctor or a lawyer. But their education and what I'm teaching them at home as a parent, I hope that it will offer them that they can do anything they want. If they reach their goal, I think that I will have achieved something as a parent. I hope my children reach what they want and never lose that family.

Kathy

The participants in this study felt that both academic achievement and cultural teachings were important in ensuring a productive, valued person in society. They suggested that each child has a gift and although each of these gifts vary, it is how these gifts are utilized and respected. It is through appreciating others' views that a reasonable compromise could exist within our current education system. By incorporating Aboriginal values and academic teachings, it was felt that the Aboriginal children could confront opportunities and challenges that arise.

## Conclusion

*Oh yes, I went to the white man's schools. I learned to read from schools books, newspapers and the Bible. But in time, I found these were not enough.... the Great Spirit has provided you and me with an opportunity for study in nature's university, the forests, the rivers, the mountains and the animals which includes us.*

*Tatanga Mani (Walking Buffalo), Stoney Nation*

Friesen, 1998, p.56

In this chapter, the parents expressed their aspirations for their children and spoke about their current involvement in the processes in both the traditional and formal education. Although at times this involvement could not be expressed through concrete measures, like memorizing their times tables, it was through lived life lessons that were unconsciously taught, however, powerful.

A sense of freedom was felt by those participants who had returned to their sense of being Aboriginal people— participating in cultural ceremonies or feeling proud of their children's ties into the culture. Recognizing their Aboriginal roots has revitalized their identity as members of a distinct and proud culture. It is the participants' wish that their culture and language be revived through the current education system. The participants in my research regarded education, both formal and traditional, as important in educating the whole child. As well as participating in the formal process of education, regeneration of the traditional Dakota culture has evolved because of the parents' interest in their children's education. These parents have begun to create a generation of children who



will have different opportunities than they did when they attended formal schooling.

They hope that this generation will be educated with a foundation of cultural and academic “tools” to encounter the challenges faced by young Aboriginal people today.

## Chapter Five

### What is the Significance of Formal Education?

*Take the best of the white man's road, pick it up and take it with you. That which is bad, leave it alone, cast it aside. Take the best of the Indian ways— always keep them. They have been proven for thousands of years. Do not let them die.*

*Chief Sitting Bull, Hunkpapa*

*Teton-Sioux*

Friesen, 1998, p.59

### Introduction

This chapter will begin with the overarching framework of the Dakota “Red Path” or the “Red Road.” The “Red Road” will be explained as a way to focus on my participants’ journeys. Robert Goodvoice, a Dakota elder, shared his understanding that we (as Dakota people) work towards in our lifetime:

‘a crown of White’, a headgear of white. Work throughout your life for that crown and if when you arrive at this stage, the crown will be in their possession. Further west, there is a land above and on this land there is no end to life, but a life full of happiness (Cankudato, 1977).

The remaining sections of the chapter will explore the four themes of childhood learning, resilience, acceptance and vision that explains where these participants are in their journey of understanding their role in their children’s education.

### **A. Childhood learning**

- Traditional education
- Introduction of the Euro-Canadian system
- Christianity vs. Aboriginal spirituality
- Racism
- Irrelevant curriculum

### **B. Resilience**

- the value of parents' teaching
- value of formal education
- suggestions on ensuring the best education possible.

### **C. Acceptance**

### **D. Vision**

In conclusion, I reflect on my research question: **How are the caregivers of Wahpeton Dakota reserve involved in the process of their children's education?**

## **The Red Path- Revisited**

The Red Path is a Dakota term that defines our life journeys; therefore, I find it appropriate to use as my overarching theme. Floyd Looks-for-Buffalo-Hand explains the Red Road as:

walk(ing) with the Great Spirit and the grandfathers at my side. I will always walk and think in a positive way. I will examine myself daily - the good things that I do, the things that I need to improve. I will listen to the Great Spirit to help guide me. I will watch Mother Nature and learn from her lessons on this sacred journey I am making.” (p.25)

The word “journey” reflects the lives of the participants as they work towards obtaining their crown of white, eldership status. All their educational and life experiences, the past, current and future, mold the ideology of these Dakota participants.

Each person in my study encountered different traditional and formal education processes. Three of the participants survived the residential school experience. Each of the participants was subject to culturally irrelevant curriculum, and for all participants, racism was prevalent in their educational life. The only participant who did not experience any of these traumatic childhood events, escaped the school system because his father did not allow him to attend.

These educational experiences moved the participants to somehow survive these events and move on to “resilience” by different means. Some participants reflected on their past family instability and hoped to create a different reality for their own children. The struggle to create this reality included triumphs of reviving cultural traditions through community events, teachings of the elders, and their children’s education in the band

school setting. Moving ahead on their journey encouraged young people to look at their experiences and to use them as teaching tools, whether good or bad, as they moved ahead on the “Red Road.”

The participants’ childhood experiences encouraged “acceptance” of the past before they were able to look clearly at their children’s present education and ponder how education had played an important role in defining their children’s role. The inspirations for their children encompassed both traditional and formal education. Formal education was viewed as important in academic success, while traditional teachings were seen as an important part of the child’s emotional and spiritual well-being. This process allowed reflect through acceptance and to cultivate the soul and to foster the development of character as they journeyed down the “Red Road”.

“Vision” was viewed as an important component of success for the participants’ children. The participants focused on the positive aspects of the band and urban education systems, which comprised a focus on Dakota language and cultural teachings. Further reflection identified the need to change certain aspects of the current system, so their child might experience overall success in a more holistic education. The “Red Road” encourages the development of the individual as a spiritual, connected being. As Dakota people we are connected to our children by our visions and aspirations for their future. This process of development means caring for the future generations that are to follow the same “Red Road”.

## **Childhood Learning**

*Our people respected the Creator's beings, and as a result, on our long history of dominance on this continent, none of the animal we hunted ever became extinct.*

*Chief John Snow, Wesley  
Band, Stoney Nation*

Friesen, 1998, p. 5

## **Traditional Education**

Traditional education was a daily lived process for the Dakota First Nations people long before Europeans arrived. "They brought their own labour, their knowledge and their customary way of doing things. They adapted these skills to the social and natural environment of the Canadian Northwest" (Elias, 1988, p.221). This lifestyle continued to some extent even after the arrival of Europeans. Within the context of traditional education there were ceremonial teachings and skills that assisted the Dakota people to survive while adapting to the ways of the Europeans.

All the participants reflected back to some of these teachings of spirituality, culture and the daily tasks of functioning as a family. Bernice reflected on aspects of daily chores, whereas Tom reflected on the culture and spiritual significance in his life. There was a difference in how these people were taught about their culture; however, the common element was that they were taught by direct observation and participation. Whether it was snaring a rabbit or participating in a ceremony, the elements of skills and protocol were introduced. These teachings assisted in sustaining daily life— water, food, shelter, spirituality and values— which involved a highly established system of educating their young people.

## **Introduction of the Euro-Canadian School System**

As European culture became part of the participants' life, so did the formal education process. The purpose of residential schools depended on the perspective of the perpetrator. J. R Miller states, "In Canada, church and state both appeared to subscribe to a thoroughly assimilative program in the residential schools, a project that was only a portion of the larger campaign for the 'extinction of the Indians as Indians'" (p. 6).

"Overall, Canadian state policy sought the assimilation of First Nations society through its young in residential schools primarily to limit, reduce, and ultimately eliminate the federal government's financial obligations to Native society" (p.7). Thus, all of the elements of the medicine wheel—emotional, physical, mental and physical— were devalued. This system subjugated them to abuses that inflicted irreparable damage to their spirit and well-being as Aboriginal people. Both Kathy and Bernice reflected back to experiences of name calling, abuse— both sexual and physical, and rigid rules that regulated their every move.

This era not only impacted the immediate families, but it created generations of unwell families. Four participants reflected on some of these issues of family separation, alcoholism and violence. For example, Mary said, "A lot of times I felt depressed because of the family violence." Family units dissipated and children were displaced into various homes and schools. Movement was not uncommon for most of the participants when they were young. The traditional significance of family and community dissolved into family units where there was not any consistency upholding the value of family.

Teddy, who was a part of the formal education process, appeared to have a balance of both traditional and formal education. In the formal setting, he felt uncomfortable in the schools because of the abuse that he encountered through fighting and name-calling. However, his home life reflected the traditional teachings and this gave him a sense of stability. He shared his interest in the ceremonies and his early teachings as a child. Like Teddy, Tom, who escaped formal education, was encouraged to learn through experiential teachings. Haig-Brown (1988) validates this traditional style of teaching, “that children learned by observation and following their parents and by doing the tasks expected of adults” (p. 30). Tom’s perception of the formal process of learning contradicted the way school is now taught. He acknowledged that academic learning was important, but he felt that education could include both traditional and formal approaches. His teachings included both daily skills and spiritual knowledge that deeply impacted his view of family and significance of culture. Spirituality and culture were the foundation of his existence. This was not the case for Mary, Kathy, Sherry and Bernice, because their foundation did not include culture and spirituality as inclusively as Tom’s upbringing, or Teddy’s childhood.

### **Christianity vs. Aboriginal Spirituality**

Christianity vs. Aboriginal spirituality became a reality for Kathy, Bernice and Mary because these people began the formal education process by attending residential school. It was expected that they would convert to Christianity ( Haig-Brown, p. 33) because religion, schooling and agriculture were a way of assimilation (Miller, p. 168).



The participants felt that Christianity was not reflective of what their experience was. Kathy reflected on her indifference to what spirituality was to be about. "I often wonder why they called themselves 'Helpers of the Lord.'" Christianity was a foreign religion that was imposed these young girls. The aftereffects impacted them, in varying degrees.

Sherry and Mary did not identify with being Aboriginal because of their parents' perceptions of their own people. Sherry notes that her dad "called it savaging. That's why white people discriminate against these people." This denial was imposed on them because their parents did not have a firm understanding of their own culture. Therefore, degrading the ceremonies and culture allowed the parents to continue this denial process because they did not understand the teachings. It was not until Sherry's father became ill that he eventually respected the Aboriginal culture through his exposure to his culture by a medicine man. This reintroduction to their culture by a significant other appeared to be the characteristic of all of those participants who had lost their spirituality.

Somehow Kathy, Mary Bernice and Sherry were reintroduced to their culture and spirituality. This process included meeting someone who introduced them to the traditional education by sharing the teachings and/or experiencing the culture. However, for Tom and Teddy, the process of teaching their children culture and tradition has been an extended family venture. Tom and Teddy spoke of their own family's involvement in passing tradition from one generation to another. Because they were exposed to their culture and spirituality at a young age, culture became a part of their teaching for their

own children. For Kathy, Sherry, Bernice and Mary their reintroduction to culture encouraged them to expose their own children to traditional education. For them, acknowledging their heritage has created a sense of worth, rather than demeaning Aboriginal peoples' values and beliefs.

## **Racism**

The Euro-Canadian education system demoralized the cultural traditions of the Aboriginal people by not recognizing them as a valued distinct society. Racism is the aftermath of colonialism. Taiaiake Alfred (1999) recognizes that the legacy of colonialism resulted in dispossession through disempowerment (p.34). Disregarding the Aboriginal's societies' capabilities to function culturally and collectively was catastrophic. Racism became prevalent through all the participants' school years, except for Tom who avoided the school process. This racism had an impact on whether the young person stayed in school or left. This is not to say that racism was the only factor that influenced the participant's decision to leave school. However, racism appeared to be what triggered the immediate desire to leave school. Kathy talks about degrading comments that were made such as " 'squaw woman' and 'you belong in the bush.' I couldn't tell anybody because I felt that I was distant from the teachers. The teachers only taught. This is where you moved from class to class and they just taught." This was the overall feeling of all of the participants.

The educators did not reprimand those people who tormented these young people. Kathy, Bernice, Sherry, and Teddy felt that the people who educated them were also

racist, as shown by their perpetrators' comments or physical abuse. Racism was one of the oppressive experiences that made Kathy, Bernice, Sherry, Teddy and Mary feel inadequate.

### **Irrelevant Curriculum**

Another problem was the lack of curriculum that affirmed Aboriginal culture. Kathy, Bernice and Mary, who attended residential schools, questioned their purpose within this school environment. While the two younger participants remember the formal school process as being irrelevant and unconnected to their reality at home.

By forcing children not to speak their language, teachers ensured that the Dakota language became almost obsolete. The people who worked for the residential schools were the enforcers of the intended policy of assimilation. "The elimination of language has always been a primary stage in a process of cultural genocide" ( Haig-Brown, 1988, p. 15). The harsh measures of abuse discouraged the speaking of their language. Kathy reflected on her situation, "They had me sitting there holding my tongue. I don't know what seemed to be a half a day - a day or something." While the children were forced to ignore their cultural upbringing, by physical, emotional, and spiritual punishment, the obliteration of Aboriginal culture was in place.

Sherry expressed her feelings towards this environment. She noted how her sister, who is visibly Aboriginal, was stereotyped into resource classes: "Actually my sister was a lot brighter than me and they had her in resource learning classes." The consequence of

stereotyping Aboriginal children as slow learners resulted in a society which produced students who could have not have competed in a system that valued high academic standards. Therefore, a system of colonial values regulated Aboriginal children's future; that of a subservient class.

These measures of oppression from the Euro-Canadian system were felt by all the participants. This deeply impacted how they felt about themselves as individuals, their lives as young people, their family units and their acceptance as Aboriginal people. Stokes (1997) and Stairs (1992) emphasize the relevance of culture and the responsibility of education to see that culture is an integral part of the schooling process. However, Aboriginal culture was not a part of these participants' lives while they attended formal school, and this set the path for future struggles.

It was the denial of culture that made these participants feel inadequate; the only person who survived these atrocities was the individual who did not receive formal education. Tom described his culture and spirituality as the sound base for understanding his existence on this earth. "I was taught nobody is special, everyone is created equal in the Creator's eyes- this is what I was taught and I believe it."

Tom described his teachings and aspirations as unifying his family. Throughout his story, he expressed his devotion and appreciation of the traditions that he was taught. He notes the temptations of the Euro-Canadian world, but he always knew where he wanted to be. The opposite was true for the other participants; they described periods of instability in their lives because they really did not have a strongly developed sense of

identity. It was not until years later that Kathy, Mary, Bernice and Sherry evolved into a sense of who they were as Aboriginal people.

### **Resilience**

*Everybody has a song to sing which is no song at all; it is a process of singing, and when you sing you are where you are.*

*Chief Joseph, Nez Perce Nation*  
Freisen, 1998, p. 28

All the participants are at various identity stages of their lives. Five of the six participants spoke openly about some of their past experiences. Sherry talked about quitting school because she was pregnant. Kathy spoke of hanging around with the “wrong friends.” Bernice speaks of floundering around because of her parents’ separation; they were not there to push her to do well. Tom speaks of a period of time when he became materialistic and lost his sense of family. Lastly, Mary speaks of her past involvement with alcohol. Although each of the experiences were different, they all imply a lost sense of balance. By balance, I mean the sense of being equally in touch with all aspects of the medicine wheel— emotionally, physically, mentally and spiritually. The resilience to persevere is obvious when these people reflect on the stage of life they are now in. Mary states, “I learned from this old man— my father-in-law . But that's because he was well balanced. I never knew a well balanced person before that. As well, my husband helped me overcome my alcohol problem.” As Mary notes that she has learned the traditional way— through oral tradition and experience.

This appears to be the way all the participants have learned. Alfred (1999) recognizes this revitalization of cultural values, “They have been damaged by colonialism. Strengthening traditional institutions means undertaking a conscious revitalization, relearning those systems and rediscovering respect for the values that support them” (p. 45). Tom and Teddy were an exception to the other participants because they continuously participated in traditional teachings. “My family has been actively involved throughout most of my life.” On the other hand, Kathy shared their learning process of traditional learning. “It means a lot to me. That’s my spirituality that I was missing back then when I was on my knees praying with hands like this. Now I feel it inside.”

All of the participants have attained some higher level education or skill-based training. All these parents felt that they were better able to cope with education in an adult education system, because it was more conducive to their needs. The jobs that these individuals are currently involved in require skills and training, thus, further education was required.

It is evident that all of these individuals are in “a process of singing, and when you sing you are where you are” (Freisen, 1998, p. 28). It is important to understand that each individual has so insightfully reflected on their past to gain insight to the future which focuses on the “Red path” vision. Each participant is at a different place on the Red Path and these experiences that they had encountered as young children have only made them who they are today. Yes, they have all survived, endured and are learning—

both in a traditional and formal sense— a lifelong journey.

### Acceptance

*The Indian needs no writings; words that are true sink deep into his heart where they remain.*

*Four Guns, Oglala Sioux Nation*

Friesen, 1998, p. 53

The participants' own experiences and the daily interaction with their children have inspired their aspirations and hopes for their children. These experiences, whether they have been negative or positive, create the reality in which each parent lives. From these individual views and experiences arise reflections on their children's lives. The place where they are now has included accepting the past, which allows them the capacity to move beyond the injustices inflicted on them. "The way to overcome the bond, external and internal, that continue to hold indigenous peoples down is to awaken people's minds to their situation" (Alfred, 1999, p. 132). This acceptance allowed all of the participants to see ahead. By comparing their children's educational experiences with their own, Teddy, Kathy and Bernice transfer to their children the skills of having a sense of independence, not a sense of powerlessness.

Depending on the age of the children, independence had a variety of meanings to different participants. Teddy, who has younger children, wanted his children to learn to learn proper hygiene such as washing their face and dressing themselves. Sherry, who also has younger children, wanted her children to be responsible in doing their homework when they arrived home. As Sherry reflected on how her life was different than her

children's, her children will not be expected to do more chores than she feels they should.

Sherry chooses to alter her children's upbringing to support her views.

On the other hand, Kathy reflects on her children's lives and on her involvement in rearing them. Kathy, who has children who range from eight to seventeen, is concerned with a variety of skills ranging from getting ready for school, to completing homework, to making choices in attending social activities outside of home. These opportunities allowed her children to focus on responsibility in completing homework, so extra-curricular activities could be enjoyed. Kathy was also available to assist her children in with difficult homework despite her feeling of incompetence with math skills.

Assisting their children in becoming independent includes a variety of methods as parents assisted in the daily interactive processes of both the home, community and school environment. They were able to compare their own experiences with today's educational demands. Parents were actively involved in preparing an environment that was conducive to learning.

This environment not only included academics, but also involved community teachings. Sherry has chosen to raise her children with cultural traditions, although it contradicted the way she was brought up. "My daughter made it as a pow-wow princess. My one boy loves sweats. He became involved on his own." Sherry supports her children by allowing them to participate in cultural traditions; she feels strongly that these teachings are important.

On the other hand, Tom communicates his own understanding of traditional



teachings to his children. Although, he recognizes that they may get off track he hopes they will find their way because of the spiritual aspect of his teachings. “They may stray away and they run back, and they want a sweat lodge and they put themselves together again.”

Mary, like Tom, recognizes that children may not follow the path that she hoped for them. They both do hope that their children will make appropriate choices with the help of their cultural upbringing. Mary states, “sometimes they get lost and then we manage to get a hold of them and then they come back.”

Also, Bernice who has teenagers, realizes that there are choices to make as her children venture out to mainstream society. She feels that “tools” are important in the raising of a child. Bernice spoke of one of her sons who recognizes the reality of life’s diversions: “If somebody is into drugs, you know they can get records and they can get themselves into deep trouble.” He had stated, “It was hard to be a Dakota.”

It appears that, depending on the age of the children, there were a variety of concerns for the parents. These concerns varied from reading and homework, to the varied social problems that arise from having teenagers and young adults in one’s family. Formal education was seen to give young people choices and freedom in life. While the older children had many societal diversions to contend with, it was felt that the traditional Aboriginal culture was significant in providing a sense of direction for their young people. Kathy acknowledges that giving guidance sometimes includes “a lot of just plain talking.” Parental involvement for these participants encompasses a wide range of

supports. It does not just include helping with homework; it includes helping the child make the right choices so they remain healthy. Thus, understanding and acceptance of the past has generated a society of Aboriginal parents who aspire to do things differently. This learning environment contradicts the system they were brought up in. Rather, the education their children are experiencing supports a learning environment that allows independence, yet focuses on all aspects of the child to have “tools” to journey down the “Red Path.”

### **Vision**

Envisioning the future of education may be an unrealistic expectation. However, because of the changes in our world, it is safe to say that we need a system that accommodates and values those who are involved. Education has had to encompass a variety of purposes by: getting the community involved; connecting families to the school; being everything to everybody— full-serviced schools; involving seniors in the process of exchange— building bridges between generations; including looking at the changing family structure, and the changing family values (Conyers, 1996; Dryfoos, 1996; Fowler & Corley, 1996; Scherer, 1996). Because the young people of the current education system include a variety of cultural groups, as well as belief systems, the struggle has been to devise a system that is respectful to all those involved. Traditionally, parental involvement has been defined by Euro-Canadians, as having the parents become involved in school activities.

## **The Value of Caregivers' Teaching**

Each of the caregivers recognizes their responsibility in ensuring “success” for their children. The parents viewed their responsibility as the person who makes sure that their children are safe, by providing advice to those who have encountered difficulties in the school setting, and situations that happen outside of school. Sherry talks about the remedial process the band school is using for behaviour problems by including parents in the process—“I guess like creating a solution for them.” While Kathy speaks of a discussion with her children regarding her son’s missing Walkman, “I usually tell my children that when there's a bully that this person has problems, a fear or something.” This is how she dealt with the situation. Lessons are taught by talking to the child to help them understand a different perspective. Values and beliefs are taught through interaction with the child by either talking or experiencing. Teddy, Bernice and Tom reflect on both types of interaction by getting their children involved directly with teachings of everyday events, as well as the protocol of ceremonies. At times, this teaching may be nourishing the gifts that each child has. Tom explains his gift that his son has, “I ask him to make a certain medicine, he's out there drying away and mixing it, shaking it up, and he brings it up to me.”

The participants teach their children through oral transmission or experiential learning. Each parent realized that these teachings had relevance to everyday life. Tom mentioned he hoped that this knowledge would be passed down to future generations. As parents, we may view life’s little lessons as short lived, however, the larger picture gives

insight into their values and beliefs as Aboriginal parents. For example, involving young children in spiritual ceremonies, reflects the healthiness of the spirit, rather than focusing on what should or shouldn't be done in life. This challenges young Aboriginal people to be responsible and accountable through appropriate right choices because they have been given the tools to assist them with these decisions.

### **The Value of Formal Education**

All of the caregivers recognized the need for the Euro-Canadian education system. It was considered to be a "tool" in succeeding in the work force. It allowed the students freedom and choice for their future. When I asked the question of "How do you feel formal education will benefit your child?" all the participants expressed the necessity for the formal education process. Their responses varied from getting a good job, to furthering their education into higher level education, to embodying the education process with a cultural component.

Success was not measured on the type of job an individual had. It was based on the freedom to chose; freedom to compete in the Euro-Canadian world. It was the hope that formal education would allow their children to become complete in every way.

### **Suggestions on Ensuring the best Education Possible**

The participants had their views about what was successful in the current education system, and they had suggestions. The parents who worked within the band school environment did not suggest what could improve directly within their school

environment; however, they recognized the need for more parental involvement. Bernice acknowledged that the band school, “employed all of our band membership except for one classroom.” Therefore, Aboriginal people hired from the community were valued as assets.

Their ideas of how formal schooling could benefit children focused on the urban setting. Kathy and Sherry suggested that there is a need to address the high drop out rate in provincial high school. This comment applied mainly to urban schools, because Wahpeton Band School only enrolls students up to grade nine. Kathy reflects that there is “a 90% drop-out rate every year. All these same kids go back to school and by May there's only about 3, 4, 5, of them still enrolled.” It was felt that the urban school community needed to accept them as Aboriginal children with life skill needs— help in dealing with racism, programming of basic skills and culture, how to do homework, or how to adapt to everyday diversions and stresses. Sherry recommends that “there could be an Aboriginal counselor to assist with the needs of the students, both in the city and at the band school.” Kathy also addresses the concept of empowering them to want to come to school because, “a lot of them don't see their future because they're thinking of today.” The idea of vision to create change has been the challenge proposed to high schools within the city.

Those who were not employed within the band school had more suggestions on how the band school environment could improve internally by ensuring:

1. an affirming consistent discipline plan
2. parental support at home
3. high academic standards
4. professional staff members were hired to fill positions and these were to be knowledge based teachers
5. respectful staff is hired to accommodate needs of students
6. cultural teachings

Discipline, high academic standards, and parental involvement were of concern for at least two of the six participants in each of the areas. A review of discipline within the band school environment was suggested. Three participants felt that their children were not in an environment that was conducive to feeling safe. It was felt that when discipline issues that came up they were not dealt with immediately and with sincerity. Therefore, a protocol was recommended when dealing directly with the children. Also, following through with activities would allow students to see that there was consistency and trust within the school environment.

Encouraging high academic standards was an area that the band school needed to look at. Tom, Teddy and Sherry felt that the school did not meet the academic needs of the students. This is why one of the parents chose to put their children in the urban schools.

Parental involvement went hand in hand with the education process. Kathy and Mary recommended that parents needed to support their children in encouraging good values and beliefs.

Mary, Teddy, Tom and Kathy stated that teaching culture is a relevant component in the education process of their children. Recognition was given to the band school in addressing most of the cultural needs of their students. However, teaching culture should not only include knowledge based curriculum, but it also included protocol in respecting Aboriginal culture. A suggestion was made by Tom to teach half and half so, “that the people understand their culture.” Mary described her time spent in Edmonton where the cultural component of education was a part of their system. The parents purposely placed their children in Aboriginal schools for this reason.

Aboriginal culture appears to be more evident in the city schools than it used to previously be. Teddy recognized that there are changes that have happened within the curriculum, such as celebrating culture by having an “Aboriginal Day”. Celebrating culture by having a day set aside is not what the caregivers of Wahpeton Dakota reserve want. They want culture to be an integral part of the education curriculum. Collaborating in the process of threading culture and the school day ensures a holistic curriculum. While it is important that the children receive encouragement by parents and educational institutions, it is important to understand the parents themselves are learning about their culture. Cultivating a soul and spirit is not only for the little people, it is for adults as well. Kathy expresses her view as an adult. “A lot of this stuff I had to learn on my own

and I had to learn fast. But I consider myself a learner still. My hopes and aspirations are that I have to prepare myself to be an elder for this community.” This continued life-long learning has been the experience of all the participants.

The participants described all the elements needed for their children to receive a good education. This form of education encourages a learning environment that is conducive to the needs of the parents: a safe, caring and trusting environment; a professional attitude by those employed; technology to support their programming; high academic standards; parental support; and a culturally-based curriculum that encouraged the Dakota language and culture combined.

## **Conclusion**

The participants in my research viewed both formal and traditional education as a holistic processes. It was their hope that these cultural teaching could be included within formal schooling, with continued support in both the home and the community. The narratives developed into themes that support this ideal of education beginning with “valuing oneself and their journey on this earth.” Participants wanted their children to function in both worlds– the Aboriginal and Euro-Canadian. These successes should not only include academic success, but also cultural knowledge.

Historically, the past cultural experiences of these parents had been ignored and disrupted by the introduction of the Euro-Canadian education system. Most of the participants– Kathy, Teddy, Mary, Sherry and Bernice– who were a part of this system survived. Their narratives focused without animosity and anger on the events that



happened. They reflected on their life experiences and focused on the betterment of their children's future. It has been the process of resilience and acceptance that has allowed these parents to focus on new educational aspirations.

On the other hand, Tom, who did not receive formal education, had confidence with who he is as a First Nations person. His cultural teachings contributed to making healthy life choices. Tom was not involved in an education system that denounced his values, culture and spirituality. He was allowed to experience his culture with freedom and without external control. This contradicted what the five other participants experienced because their identity evolved from a system that eradicated their culture. Consequently, "not having a voice" was a reality for them in the realm of formal education.

The message that was prevalent through the participants' discourse was the concept of independence, which would allow each young person to create their reality through choice and experience. Rather than focusing on the perception that Aboriginal parents are not actively involved in their children's education, mainstream society needs to realize that Aboriginal caregivers are actively involved. The Euro-Canadian system has misunderstood the Aboriginal caregivers of this research by imposing their idea of parental involvement in education.

Taiaiake Alfred (1999) proposes the thought that we need "the kind of education that would force the general population to engage with realities other than their own, increasing their capacity to empathize with others—to see other points of view and to

understand other people's motivations and desires." Currently, it has been Aboriginal communities' desire to integrate formal academic knowledge with their own cultural upbringing.

### **My Research Question**

*And so I say to you, the EuroCanadians; you have discovered our land and its resources, but you have not yet discovered my people nor our teachings, nor the spiritual basis of our teachings.*

*Chief John Snow, Wesley Band  
Stoney Nation  
Friesen, 1998, p. 60*

**How are the caregivers of Wahpeton Dakota Reserve involved in the process of their child's education?** Euro-Canadians have defined parental involvement in a way that permeates the minds of those who research this area. According to the research literature, parent involvement has been defined (Cheng-Gorman & Balter, 1997; Fowler & Klebs-Corley, 1996), as involvement within a school setting. Dodds (1996) recognizes that parental involvement is not only significant to the mainstream culture, but rather is important to all parents, regardless of socio-economic status or cultural background (p. 44). These two statements hold true for the Dakota caregivers on the Wahpeton reserve, but their involvement is a more complex process than that described in the literature.

It was clear that all participants wanted a sense of balance—emotionally, physically, mentally, and spiritually—for their children. It was evident that those who had younger children were concerned about different needs for their children. These parents focused on preparation before school, while encouraging the skills and

involvement needed for their child to be successful in school. Parents of older children had different concerns.

All the Dakota parents were actively involved in their children's education by demonstrating love for their children. Three caregivers, who were actively involved in the formal school setting, participated in Band school committees which implemented school initiatives. Other parents supported their children's learning by attending functions that encouraged practical involvement. For example, one participant spoke of eating lunch with their child on a special school day. This involvement, in both the band and urban setting, included attending cultural days and special events. Most participants felt welcome in their children's school environment. Three parents became somewhat involved—by attending some parent teacher meetings. Parents also assisted with their children's work in the formal setting as best they could. The parents of older children realized at times they could not always assist because the course content was too difficult. They acknowledged that direct involvement within the school created support for their children. Providing a safe environment was also a concern, not only in the school, but also outside its perimeters. This recognizes that parental involvement includes not only the academic aspect of formal education, but also it encompasses much more.

From my research it appears that parental involvement does not need to be enacted within formal education. Insights from the conversations and my reflections on how formal educational experiences have affected my participants leads to a more complex understanding of parental involvement. Those participants who had older

children were concerned with their safety. This safety was a concern outside the Aboriginal reserve community as well. Their children were exposed to outside diversions that could influence them to make the wrong choices. The caregivers understood the reality that these youth had opportunities presented to them that could traumatically affect the rest of their lives. Therefore, formal education was not necessarily in the forefront of all caregivers' minds at all times. Education for the Dakota caregivers with whom I spoke encompassed a holistic philosophy of traditional education– the emotional, physical, and spiritual wellness of the child.

It is important to state that the participants recognized the need for formal education. The parents felt that formal education would give their children choice and opportunity to succeed in the world beyond the reserve. It was felt that education allowed their children choice for job opportunities, but for them becoming a doctor or lawyer was not a priority. Rather, being happy with what their children did was most important. Education was viewed as source of freedom to choose for those who wanted that opportunity. Although the participants felt that academic skills were highly important, they believed that education needed to be inclusive of all needs. This reflects the traditional Dakota education idea that “all are interrelated”.

The Dakota participants in my research encountered a variety of experiences in their lives. They were able to reflect on their traditional and formal educational experiences with honesty and humility. Each step down the “Red Path” allowed them to develop insight into their experience; I would wonder whether those who have not had

such a challenging educational experiences would have such insight into their own experiences. Going through chaos sometimes precipitates a deeper reflection on life's meaning. It has been the caregivers' experience of childhood learning, resilience, acceptance and vision that has created their hopes and aspirations for their own children. All the parents– Kathy, Teddy, Mary, Bernice, Sherry and Tom– describe a holistic vision for their children's education with an “active contributing voice”.

## Chapter Six

### Reflections and Conclusions

#### Introduction

I will begin this chapter by focusing on the story of who I am now. I will reflect on my methodology from my own experience as an Aboriginal educator, woman, and mother. Lastly, I will reflect on what could be done to ensure that parental involvement from the Aboriginal perspective will be recognized as an integral component of education.

Brothers and Sisters:  
These words are a prayer of hope for a new  
path to wisdom and power.  
Anguished hearts, minds, and bodies  
are the profound reality of our world.

We have lost our way  
and the voices of our ancestors go unheeded.  
This is our ordeal.

There are those who remember  
what has had meaning since time began  
but we are deaf to their wisdom.

Why do we not hear them?  
Suffering; the dragons of discord.

Wipe the tears from your eyes  
Open your ears to the truth

Prepare to speak in the voice of your ancestors.  
This is a discourse of condolence.  
A prayer of hope for a new path.

Taiaiake Alfred, 1999

## **Who I am now**

Quietly, my son and I walked down the corridor of an unfamiliar building. I admired the office decor. We walked quietly by a dentist's office and I decided to see what she had to offer. I opened the door slowly, and peeked in. As I glanced around the room, I quickly noticed the Aboriginal art work on the wall. There were paintings by Allan Sapp, and there was also a colourful mask from British Columbia. Immediately, I felt that this was a place I wanted to be. I always thought I felt at place in both worlds—Euro-Canadian and Aboriginal— but I never realized until this incident the depth of my need to feel accepted as an Aboriginal person.

Feeling accepted means to me is understanding who I am as an Aboriginal person. This does not mean I necessarily fit into the mold of what Euro-Canadians define as either a traditional Aboriginal person, or a person who grew up with Euro-Canadian values. Instead, I understand that I came from a unique experience that has tied me into both worlds. This journey along the Red Path of understanding my culture has evolved by learning about and experiencing my Aboriginal roots. I feel fortunate to have arrived at this place, because I now feel proud being an Aboriginal person with strong ties to the Euro-Canadian world.

With this thought, I reflect back on how I arrived here. I realize that I have grown while writing this thesis. Not only have I evolved from a person who did not know a great deal about my culture, but through my research study and teaching Native Studies—grades ten, eleven and twelve— for four years, I have become knowledgeable about

Canadian Aboriginal history, our current struggles and educational initiatives. I have had the opportunity to experience traditional teachings and ceremonies while participating in my own healing journey. I have also challenged my worldview to see if it is different than the way I use to view my world.

I realize that my values and belief system have always reflected respect and acceptance of others, while encouraging others and their worldview to be expressive. I realize for me, that being a “good” Aboriginal mother and partner has been deeply affected by the residential school experience, because my mother attended residential school. My mother, who has been a wonderful mentor in other respects, did the best she could under the circumstances that she was placed. I now realize that a detached type of love at home and a lack of having a voice as an Aboriginal person in society had influenced my struggles with identity.

## **Methodology**

“Traditionalists, recognizing the risk of intellectual co-optation, have adopted a traditional solution: focusing not on opposing external power, but instead on actualizing their own power and preserving their intellectual independence. This is an indigenous approach to empowerment (Alfred, 1999, p. 48).

Although ethnography was not utilized in a Euro-Canadian methodological sense, the techniques of qualitative research allowed me to research with an Aboriginal lens.

Aboriginal peoples have traditionally adapted the imposed external power by redefining research. Marie Battiste and James Youngblood-Henderson (2000) state that it is important to analyze indigenous research by recognizing the perspective of the researcher.



“Interpretations of Indigenous knowledge depend on researchers’ attitudes, capabilities, and experiences, and on their understanding of indigenous consciousness, language, and order” (p.134). By recognizing all of the factors that have influenced my life, it is I the researcher that have recognized the need to relate the stories of these Dakota people from a unique Aboriginal perspective. Taiaiaiki (1999) challenges the indigenous population to assert their own power:

it is not enough to survive and heal; there is also a responsibility to rebuild the foundations of nationhood by recovering a holistic traditional philosophy, reconnecting with our spirituality and culture, and infusing our politics and relationships with traditional values. But the collective will require the shining lights of leadership provided by individual guides and mentors (p. 36).

By listening with respect to my participants I have taken on the responsibility to share our stories with as little intrusion as possible by Euro-Canadian values.

Although the narratives from the participants from Wahpeton Dakota Reserve varied, all their lives had been deeply affected by the introduction of the Euro-Canadian education system. Denial of who they were as a people was perpetrated by a system that rationalized as assisting them in adjusting to their new way of life. Disregarding Aboriginal traditions and culture— language, spirituality, ceremonies— led the mainstream education system to be involved in the disintegration of a society. Ironically this system is now is searching for a way to include those who were once ignored.

The outcome of an education system that chose to impose its curriculum resulted in young children who faced extreme racism. This racism was one of the main factors

that contributed to young Aboriginal people quitting school. Neglecting a culture views created generations of people who devalued themselves; thus, they encountered many negative experiences in their youth and teenage years. The only individual who was able to avoid a lot of these diversions was Tom, who was grounded in his traditions and culture, and he did not attend school at all. Even though the participants were impacted by the formal school system, they were able to be optimistic about their children's education.

### **Visions for Schools**

Culture and traditional knowledge were rated as the most important aspects that formal education needed to include. There were two participants, Tom and Teddy, who had a traditional upbringing while Bernice, Sherry, Kathy and Mary did not. And although their knowledge of traditional teachings varied, it was of utmost importance to them that Aboriginal culture was included for their children. In fact, this component appeared to be one of the determining factors that influenced why selected participants chose the band school over the urban school. On the other hand, band schools were challenged to have high academic expectations for their children so they may compete in the Euro-Canadian world. Teddy chose the city schools for this reason. He felt that this system academically challenged his children. However, because of Teddy's knowledge of language, culture and traditions, he was able to teach his own children his understanding of his culture. It appears that a lot of the participants are on their own journey of cultural understanding, with the exception of Tom, and these participants

depended on the band school to generate this understanding.

To the participants, culture meant including traditional teachings. Traditional teachings were to reinstate what was lost:

1. The Dakota language is vitally important to rejuvenate the understandings that have been lost.
2. Culture should be taught through understanding the protocol of the traditions and spiritual ceremonies.
3. A sense of pride needs to be generated by including classes that assist in adapting to life challenges: academic choices, doing homework, dealing with racism, making appropriate choices, career availability, and understanding why they are in school.

Recognizing that the purpose of education, both traditional and formal, combined will instill a sense of pride and initiative to excel as a whole being. These teachings will then encompass all aspects of the medicine wheel to create a child who is at peace with himself.

### **The Research Process**

I felt that the overall process of the research went quite well. However, I do acknowledge that I did not have one caregiver that was not involved in formal education in some sense. However, three participants attended few functions. Two did not attend

any school function except the odd parent-teacher interviews. Not including a caregiver of this type may have altered my study in some respects. Also, I had difficulty trying to locate one participant, but after locating his mother it was easy to commit him to an interview time.

Participants were very generous with their time and their hospitality. Our conversations evolved into a intimate discussion about past atrocities and good experiences to current desires for their children, while critically analyzing the negative and positive aspects of the school system their children are a part of.

The most overwhelming difficulty was trying to define what parental involvement is from an Aboriginal perspective. As I gathered the data and the themes began to develop, I realized that the definition of Aboriginal parental involvement included much more than the Euro-Canadian definitions. These parents want the best for their children. They assist at home by preparing the best environment they can for their child. This may be by assisting their children in making good choices outside of the school by having a heart to heart talk. These participants also help at home with emphasizing skills and knowledge from both an academic and traditional Dakota sense.

This concern was alleviated once one I related my question to a general understanding of the Aboriginal worldview. Historically, traditional Aboriginal people agree that the teachings that are given to the child should be in balance with the nature of the whole child. Thus, the skills taught to a young person when learning to be a hunter include not only the physical skills, but respect for all living things. This meant that your

body needed to be in physical shape to endure the hunt, but you also needed to develop the respect and understanding for nature through spirituality. It is apparent that from my study that we need to understand how the traditional teachings of Aboriginal people were transmitted. Aboriginal parenting includes respecting the well being of the child from a holistic point of view.

### **Implications for the Formal Education Process**

“Education can not be everything to everyone” is a common statement made by educators. However, out of respect and compassion this challenge needs to be addressed. Statistics demonstrate that Aboriginal students tend to drop out in high school. Our vision in the present education system is to encourage each child’s talents and to provide opportunities to excel with these gifts to its clients. This study challenges our view of what parental involvement is to the Aboriginal caregivers of Wahpeton Dakota Reserve. Participants in my study defined parental involvement as encompassing the well-being of the whole child. Therefore, the challenge has been posed to create an education system that encompasses this philosophy.

As educators, we are absorbed in a system that has rigid academic curriculum expectations. Standardized tests evaluate and regulate the intended and hopefully achieved outcome for the mainstream child to become competent in higher level education.

By including Dakota culture, language and spirituality in varying degrees, these participants felt that their child would have the tools to cope in society. The participants

in this study were anxious to address their children's needs. Thus, alternate understandings of parental involvement may mean giving voice to those who are not actively involved in schools.

This study does not recommend concrete solutions on how Aboriginal parents can be encouraged to become involved in their children's education. These studies have been done. Rather, I will focus on a traditional teaching that will guide those who are in search for answers.

"Among North American indigenous societies in general there was a powerful imperative to avoid imposing one's will on another individual. This autonomy was extended to the young children, permitting them great scope for self-expression ([http://collections.ic.gc.ca/shingwauk/Section2/section2\\_1\\_4.html](http://collections.ic.gc.ca/shingwauk/Section2/section2_1_4.html)).

This research has recognized many needs expressed by the caregivers of Wahpeton Dakota reserve. These findings were developed through relationships with others, both positive and negative, and although their experiences varied, there were common community needs that transpired in the realm of teachers and learners.

The same outcome applied to the youth acquiring knowledge; this knowledge depended on their geographical region. These differences were obvious:

"The differing economies of these peoples, for example, would necessitate that the young in various parts of the northern half of the continent be taught skills that differed from nation to nation. These nations could not be expected to subscribe to a uniform system of socialization, instruction, and vocational training" ([http://collections.ic.gc.ca/shingwauk/Section2/section2\\_1\\_2.html](http://collections.ic.gc.ca/shingwauk/Section2/section2_1_2.html)).

Although there were differences, similarities existed regarding how the youth were to be taught. It was through subtle and conscious teachings that provided the basis

for the young to learn by means of guidance, dialogue, and utilization to ceremonies with due solemnity (shingwauk/Section2/section2\_1\_2.html).

One excerpt on the internet, taken from Shingwauk's Vision by J.R. Miller, explains the traditional education of the Indigenous people as the three L's— Look, Listen and Learn. And with this explanation, I would like to expand by sharing my vision by using an acronym, **DIALOGUE** to define its significant implication in the field of education.

<b>D evelop/Diversity</b>	Recognizing that diversity exists, a movement to develop change --policy, curriculum, etc--to suit the communities' needs
<b>I ndependent</b>	Create a community that becomes independent and self-determining with this knowledge
<b>A ccomodating</b>	Those who are involved need to have a validated voice and to understand that with diversity we may need to look outside the 'box'
<b>L earning</b>	We are a community of learners with equal voice.
<b>O wnership</b>	When we create and develop a vision for our youth within the community it becomes 'ours'
<b>G uidance</b>	Recognizing that there are requirements made by the departments of our school divisions, policy implementation may be challenging, but with guidance this challenge may be overcome
<b>U nique</b>	Recognizing that each community is unique, there will be different needs that will vary from one community to another
<b>E ducation</b>	Realizing that education could not exist without relationships, it is

for this purpose that dialogue between all invested partners needs to be continuous process

An example of this format might be initiated through a focus group to find out what parents are looking for in educating their children. This focus group could be set up first on the reserve to analyze the concerns and visions for their people in the band school environment and in the city. A supportive group may want to address the high rate of dropout in high school by setting up a focus group of students who are either in school or who have left. The findings of these reports may instigate further involvement and commitment to look at students' and caregivers' needs and how they can be communicated to the vested parties—band school and city schools.

### **A Final Thought**

Dr. L. Tuhiwai-Smith (March 26, 2002), a Maori educator in New Zealand, spoke at a recent presentation at the University of Saskatchewan and she shared this story. It related to acknowledging and validating the perspective of others and looking outside of the “box”. In this situation it was a parent who understood the concept she was to transmit but saw things through different eyes.

There was a parent who was sharing a skill with some students and educators in their school. She began to mold a paper mache model of her country—New Zealand. And while she was molding her version of her country, educators were observing her intently. The parent began to mold the mountains and land mass the way she knew it to be. The educators noticed that this parent was placing landforms in different places than



they were taught in geography. Dr. Smith mentioned that no one was brave enough to ask the parent what she was doing, rather they allowed her to complete her work.

After completion, the parent noticed the puzzled looks on the educators' faces.

The parent immediately responded to the distressed looks and stated that she knew exactly exactly what was going on in the minds of those who watched her. She began to share her understanding of the world as she saw it and this the way she molded it through her demonstration of paper mache. Her interpretation was shared through oral tradition, by stories she was told. For example, this mountain moved here, and the hills were once here however, the wind carried them here and so on. This how she saw her world.

This story challenges educators to address those perceptions that are outside of the box, and to strive to provide an inclusive education system that addresses diverse needs. I have honoured the Indigenous way of teaching. This study has allowed those who were once silenced to have a voice. In respect, the interpretation is left up to you, the reader to reflect on this study and its vision for the future.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**APPLICATION TO THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON ETHICS IN**  
**BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCE RESEARCH**

APPLICATION TO THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON ETHICS IN  
BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

University of Saskatchewan

**Application for Approval of Research Protocol**  
**Submitted to the Advisory Committee on Ethics in**  
**Behavioural Science Research**

**April 15, 2000**

**1. NAME OF SUPERVISOR & DEPARTMENT**

Graduate Supervisor  
Dr. Angela Ward  
Associate Professor  
Curriculum Studies  
College of Education  
University of Saskatchewan  
Saskatoon, SK  
(306) 966-7585  
fax 966-7658

**1a. NAME OF STUDENT RESEARCHER & STUDY**

Brenda Lynne Green  
Master's Program  
Department of Curriculum Studies  
College of Education  
University of Saskatchewan  
Saskatoon, SK  
(306) 955-2022

**1b. RESEARCH TIMELINE**

Start date: June, 2000  
Completion date: August, 2000

**2. TITLE OF STUDY**

The Care-givers of Wahpeton Dakota Reserve and their involvement in their children's education.

### 3. ABSTRACT

This ethnographic study will involve Wahpeton Dakota Reserve caregivers by accessing their involvement in the process of formal and informal education that their children are partaking in. The data will be collected by using semi-structured interviews involving twelve participants--six actively involved in the band school setting and six not actively involved. The final report will consist of the narratives formulated during interviews that will suggest recommendations to actively involve all partners in the process of education.

#### Benefits of the Study:

This qualitative study will respect the protocol of research on the Wahpeton Dakota Reserve while actively sharing the voice of the community by incorporating their views about education. This process will enhance the understanding and interpretation of a band school setting for those involved in the education process of Aboriginal children. This will be done by:

- acknowledging the goals and expectations of the participants who have children in the band school environment.
- contributing to the desire of the Wahpeton Dakota people to become involved in (CBPR) Community-Based Participatory Research by partaking in semi-structured interviews.
- encouraging self-determination at the band school level by validating voice and the educational needs for the future of these Aboriginal children.
- involving the community in recognizing and acknowledging the need for continuous change to accommodate the values and beliefs of their reserve.
- encouraging collaboration with the band school and urban school setting to involve Aboriginal caregivers in the process of their children's education.
- expanding research by involving a unique First Nation's community so mainstream society may validate and recognize this communities desires for their children.

#### **4. Funding**

There are no source of funds supporting this research.

#### **5. PARTICIPANTS**

The participants involved in this study will consist of twelve caregivers of children who attend Wahpeton Dakota Reserve Band School. These caregivers will be the primary "parents" who are responsible for the well-being of each child in their care. Three of the caregivers chosen will be actively involved in the band school setting and three caregivers will not be actively involved. The participants will have children in a variety of grade levels; thus, encouraging a broad representation of all levels of education.

These individuals will be approached by myself through the assistance of the School committee and other members of the Wahpeton Dakota reserve. Because three of the parents will not be actively involved in the "formal" education process of their children, sensitivity will be an intricate part of approaching the respondent. The School committee was approached in the Spring of 1998 and permission was granted for the research to proceed. Two parents approached the interviewer and were anxious to participate in this study. Approaching the school committee when this research is approved by the university will allow ample time to find the appropriate candidates.

The criteria for the respondent are as follows:

- i) Participants are to be members of the Wahpeton Dakota Reserve and have resided in this community for a period of at least five years.
- ii) Participants will have at least one child who is presently enrolled in the Wahpeton Dakota Band School whose children regularly attend.
- iii) Participants will not be gender specific to include both perspectives on the process of their child's education.
- iv) Participants will include six individuals who are actively involved in the band school situation, while six individuals will not be involved in this formal education process.

v) Participants may include members of the Band council, School committee, Elders or members from the general population of this community.

## **6. METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION**

After research participants have been chosen and given the interview questions ahead of time, interviews will be scheduled according to the availability of these individuals. Scheduling will consist of two interviews per day and these interviews will be done in the environment that they most feel comfortable in--home, relative's home, coffee house, band school. Interviews may last from 60 minutes up to 180 minutes depending on the flow of conversation. Initial visits to the band school and ceremonies will assist in recognition of who I am as a researcher and the connection to my family ties through relatives. Data collection will consist of semi-structured interviews as well as participant observation. These interviews will be done on a voice activated tape recorder and will be classified and categorized according to code names. Data collection through semi-structured interviews and participant-observation will allow a casual, accepting rapport to develop. It is through Ethnography and its gathering methods that best accepts culture and its narratives.

### **Participant-Observation:**

The researcher will gain entry into the field by certain characteristics of participant-observation by:

- sharing the research study, its purpose, and its significance to the Wahpeton people through the School committee and Parent Council meeting.
- ensuring the confidentiality and stating the methods of data collecting that will be used
- visiting the band school environment while the children are in school and parents are casually interacting at the band office.
- reintroducing my ties to the community as a member of Wahpeton Dakota Band

### **Semi-Structured Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews allow comfort for the researcher and the participant to

develop a rapport that will allow freedom of expression so rich, thick data can be obtained. This will consist of:

- reviewing the purpose of the study
- reassuring the participant of confidentiality so the conversation will not be inhibited in any manner
- open-ended questions and close-ended questions to guide the interview in exploring all responses from the respondent
- non-threatening questions to begin the interview so trust may build as the interview proceeds
- listening and respecting the moments of silence while progressing with questions at the
- appropriate times

## Data Analysis

Translating data will consist of:

- collecting field notes to capture the essence of the interview in a journal
- hiring a professional transcriber to accurately transcribe the data
- coding will consist of organizing themes, words and patterns that are apparent into categories

## 7. RESPECTING PROTOCOL

The informants that will be partaking in the study will not encounter any type of external conflict because the protocol of Wahpeton Dakota Reserve will be followed by stating:

- the purpose of the study
- that confidentiality will be assured by explaining the process that the research will follow
- a contract will be drawn up so all parties involved will have the expectations and process of the research
- that appropriate letters of consent will be given to those involved to ensure proper procedures are followed
- how the process of data will be collected and analyzed
- that research will be made available during the study and will be available to the Wahpeton Dakota people after the study has been finalized

## 8. **CONFIDENTIALITY**

The community of Wahpeton Dakota reserve is small; therefore, confidentiality is a priority when the researching the field. The interview tapes gathered with a voice-activated tape recorder will only be accessed by the researcher and eventually the transcriber. Absolute confidentiality will be promised by the researcher by following these steps:

- written contracts will be developed to ensure confidentiality
- names will be coded by the researcher while taking field-notes and taping so confidentiality will be ensured.
- tapes and field-notes will be stored in a secure safety box with a lock and the transcriber will be a bonded professional
- that before transcripts are typed for final draft that the respondent will have an opportunity to edit any comments shared during the interview for accuracy
- ensuring that through the process of writing my thesis that names, place of



interview, place of residence or dates will not be used so individuals may not be identified.

## **9. CONSENT**

For the Wahpeton Dakota people, a contract is to be devised before research can proceed. This contract will acknowledge the purpose and guidelines of the study; thus, discrepancies will be eliminated. The contract or consent will ensure the parties of their expectations as well as the researchers. Attached (see forms)

information letter to band council, school committee, and participant outlining the process of the research and approximate time required

consent letter to proceed with research with the Band administration and School committee

consent to transcribe-- participant--before and after transcripts have been typed

## **10. FEEDBACK**

Feedback to the invested parties of Wahpeton will be a priority so deception does not occur. The Chief, Band council and school committee will be informed of when the research will begin and when it has been completed. A selected period of time will be required so transcripts can be formulated. Once the data has been transcribed it will be confidentially shown to the participant for clarity and confirmation. If an informant wishes to delete any data that will appear in the study this will be done. Also if a subject wishes to terminate their service from the research this permission will be granted. A copy of the final thesis study will be given to the Wahpeton Dakota Reserve as a resource and a token of appreciation to research my people.

It is my obligation to respect the ethical principles of the Wahpeton Dakota people as well as the University of Saskatchewan's ethical guidelines. Within my study, I will adhere to the regulations of research to respect the Aboriginal people and to be sensitive to their world view. I will conduct research, while listening with an open mind to gain valuable insight, to eliminate inaccurate assumptions.

**APPENDIX B**  
**LETTER OF APPROVAL**

**UNIVERSITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
ON ETHICS IN BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCE RESEARCH**

**NAME:** A. Ward (B.Green)

**BSC#:** 2000-92

**DATE:** June 26, 2000

The University Advisory Committee on Ethics in Behavioural Science Research has reviewed the Application for Ethics Approval for your study “ The Care-givers of Wahpeton Dakota Reserve and their Involvement in their Children’s Education” (00-92).

1. Your study has been APPROVED.
2. Any significant changes to your proposed study should be reported to the Chair for Committee consideration in advance of its implementation.
3. The term of this approval is for 5 years.

I wish you a successful and informative study.

---

Valerie Thompson, Chair  
University Advisory Committee  
on Ethics in Behavioural Science Research

VT/bjk

**APPENDIX C**  
**INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

### Overarching Questions

1. As a person of Wahpeton Dakota Reserve, tell me about a typical school day for your child.
2. When you were young, how was your school day different from your child's day?
3. How did your family teach you "traditional knowledge?"
4. What have you seen that has changed in your child's education, compared to what education was like for you?
5. How do you feel "school" education will benefit your child?
6. How do you teach your child values and beliefs?
  - (i) What opportunities are presented for informal learning in the home or in the community?
7. What could be added to formal education to ensure the best possible education for your child?
8. Describe your hopes for your children?
9. How are you involved in you child's education? examples....
  - (ii) What could be done to continue or encourage your participation at the band school?

**APPENDIX D**  
**PILOT STUDY**

### **Pilot Study**

As a beginner researcher, the pilot study that I was involved in allowed me to experience the process of semi-structured interviewing. I wanted to choose someone who would fit the criteria for my study. The person I chose fit this requirement. The process I used to introduce my research followed the requirements, but with a trial interview I noted aspects that I missed that will be discussed further in this section. However, after contacting my participant she appeared interested in being my volunteer and she graciously offered her services.

The participant chose the time and place of the interview so that it would be convenient and comfortable. Ethnography encourages the interviewer to become familiar with the participant's surroundings, therefore, choosing her office at the Peter Ballantyne office allowed me to meet with others whom she worked with. I felt very comfortable in her place of employment because of my cultural background and acceptance by Aboriginal people.

The reason I chose this participant was because of her active involvement with the Aboriginal Advisory Committee as a representative for the school that my daughter attends. I knew of her in an informal way but had never had the opportunity to converse with her. Although she is not from the same Aboriginal nation, she shared the same interests as the other Aboriginal parents. Therefore, she was a prime candidate for this pilot study.

The pilot study began by my formally introducing myself on the phone to the participant and then I proceeded to inform her of what my pilot study would involve. I asked her if she would be interested and I assured her anonymity regarding the collaboration of information. I wanted to supply her with the questions ahead of time to allow her to constructively evaluate and formulate well thought out answers.

I informed her that if there was any clarification required she could call me. The ability to extensively review these questions is up to the interviewee and this may or may not be accomplished because of time constraints and questions that may arise. This observation has allowed me to be readily available, if needed.

#### **Initial Questions**

1. As a person of Wahpeton Dakota Reserve, tell me about a typical school day for your child.
2. When you were young, how was your school day different from your child's day?
3. How did your family teach you "traditional knowledge?"
4. What have you seen that has changed in your child's education, compared to what education was like for you?

5. How do you feel "school" education will benefit your child?
6. How do you teach your child values and beliefs?
  - (i) What opportunities are presented for informal learning in the home or in the community?
7. What could be added to formal education to ensure the best possible education for your child?
8. Describe your hopes for your children?
9. How are you involved in your child's education? examples....
  - (ii) What could be done to continue or encourage your participation at the school?

The participant began by responding to the first question--describe to me a typical school day for your child. Also, I needed to ask an initial question of who she was, what her background was, and how many children she had currently attending school. La Compte & Preissle acknowledges these processes I forgot as (1) the purpose, (2) the respondent's protection and, (3) the researcher's intent. (1993, p. 180). This information would have supplied background information to initially begin the interview.

The participant responded to the first question by telling me that the school day was hectic because she is a single parent and she followed a plan to begin her day. She makes sure that her children's homework is done and that they feel comfortable and relaxed when going to school. The second question--when you were young, how was your school day different from your child's day? She responded that her day was different because she lived up north and took a canoe to school or a Bombardier. She went to a residential school where the students spoke Cree and she was the only one who spoke English, so she was expected to help the others with English. She eventually moved south and then she was introduced to the "white world" by facing extreme racism. She recalled teachers yelling at the students for speaking Cree. She feels that schools are different now.

Question eight--describe your hopes for your children--described her hopes for her children to be able to believe in themselves, spell with confidence, to be able to play by oneself. "Basically, by bestowing confidence in themselves. Being able to see the good and bad in thing, being confident." As the researcher, I felt that she summed this up as having a positive self-esteem and then the rest of life's journey would be productive. The process of "speculating" began to become apparent as I reviewed the transcript. Encouraging further conversation assured accurate responses to my initial questions. The responses were enlightening even though the communication we had was very informal.

I acknowledged how Denzin (1978) proposes to assess interview transcripts when I reviewed the oral transcript, : (1) communication of meaning, (2) expression of respondent interest, (3) clarity of question and response, (4) precision of interview intention, (5) integration of intent, within interviewer questions, and (6) interviewer



management of potential respondent fabrication. This initiation into the field of ethnography utilizing the tool of interviewing was a valuable asset in recognizing the areas that need to be worked on and the areas that went well. Overall, the interview was very informative. I know from the initial contact with my pilot study participant that it may be difficult to reach my participants to commit to a meeting time, therefore, commitment and persistence may be a process to initiate conversation. I felt excited to pursue my formal research question--How are the parents of Wahpeton Dakota Reserve involved in the process of their child's education? My initial pilot study gave me a valuable introduction to be able to proceed with confidence. I used my pilot study as a beginning tool to gain greater insight into the field of qualitative research.

The interview had "a script, an agenda and a purpose set by the researcher" (LaCompte & Preisile, 1993, p. 179). The pilot study allowed me to venture into the field of research by utilizing the tools required to be successful.

**APPENDIX E**  
**LETTER TO ALL PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED**

231-Kenosee Crescent  
Saskatoon, Sk.  
S7J 3T1

June 1, 2000

Hau Koda:

I am Brenda Green, a member of Wahpeton Dakota Reserve, and a current graduate student at the University of Saskatchewan. The area of study that I am working on is in the area of Curriculum Studies in the field of education. It is my desire to conduct my study with the people of Wahpeton reserve and to thoroughly explain the process of research that I intend to follow. My research is "how are the aboriginal care-givers of Wahpeton Dakota Reserve Band School involved in the process of their children's education?" This question is quite open-ended but would be followed up with semi-structured questions to inspire thoughtful responses. I am interested in these responses to formulate accurate accounts of the participants involved.

The interviews would consist of six care-givers that are actively involved in their child's education at the band school level and six care-givers that are not actively involved in the band school setting. However, I will respect that all individuals may be involved in some aspects of their children's education in an informal sense. All informants would be involved in the methodology process suggested by Leo Omani's thesis--Community-Based Participatory Research. The questions will be given ahead of time and a voice activated tape machine will be used as to not interrupt the flow of conversation. A journal book will also be taken to record the interviewee's voice and mood of the environment. The interviews will be taken in confidence and code numbers and letters will be used to protect the anonymity of the participant. .

Confidentiality and respect of the community will be a priority. The tapes will be transcribed by a bonded professional and will be kept in a safety deposit box. Once the transcripts are complete, they will be shown to the participants involved to either revise, delete or adhere to their responses. Any individual who wishes to decline further involvement may do so at any time. The place and date of the interviews will be at the discretion of the participant.

It is my intent to visit the School committee to inform them of the official time when the research will begin and the time it would be completed. Any formalities regarding the progress of the research will be disclosed when applicable. It is my desire to begin the interview approximately June 19, 2000 while the school year is fresh in everyone's mind. Finally, a copy of my thesis will be given to the Wahpeton library. Your time and support is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Brenda Green

We have read the agreement made by the researcher to adhere to the expectations placed upon all parties involved and agree that the research may progress as outlined. Signed:

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Representative of :

The band council \_\_\_\_\_

School committee \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher \_\_\_\_\_

Elder \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX F**  
**CONSENT LETTER FOR CAREGIVER PARTICIPANTS**

## Caregiver Participant Consent

(Researcher's copy)

\_\_\_\_\_ have read the letter informing the participants of the criteria of the research. With these guidelines, I agree to participate in Brenda Green's study: **The Caregivers of Wahpeton Dakota Reserve and their involvement in their children's education.**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing address: \_\_\_\_\_

Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone number: \_\_\_\_\_

or Contact number: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's signature \_\_\_\_\_

---

## Caregiver Participant Consent

(Participant's Copy)

I, \_\_\_\_\_ have read the letter informing the participants of the criteria of the research. Within these guidelines, I agree to participate in Brenda Green's study: **The Caregivers of Wahpeton Dakota Reserve and their involvement in their children's education.**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Contact number \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX G**  
**DATA/TRANSCRIPT RELEASE FORM**

### **Data/Transcript Release Form**

(Researcher's Copy)

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have reviewed the oral transcripts of my personal interview, and have agreed that these transcripts accurately reflect my opinion relating to the interview questions asked by Brenda Green. Therefore, I authorize permission to release the transcripts to Brenda Green to be used in the ethical format outlined in the consent form.

Participant \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

---

### **Data/Transcript Release Form**

(Participant's Copy)

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have reviewed the oral transcripts of my personal interview, and have agreed that these transcripts accurately reflect my opinion relating to the interview questions asked by Brenda Green. Therefore, I authorize permission to release the transcripts to Brenda Green to be used in the ethical format outlined in the consent form.

Participant \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_



**APPENDIX H**  
**DEFINITION OF TERMS**

## **Definition of Terms**

Aboriginal: According to the Canadian Constitution of 1982, Aboriginal people of Canada include the Indian, Inuit, and Metis peoples of Canada.

Caregiver in a First Nation Community: “ It’s not unusual for a First Nations child to be reared by extended family members or community members. These caregivers are a child’s first teacher.” ( B.C. Aboriginal Headstart Program, 1997) For centuries, First Nation people have regarded children, not as their own, but a gift from the creator; it was the responsibility of the community to raise all children as their own. This belief still exists as grandparents, relatives and biological parents may have shared responsibility for a child. It is the intention of the researcher to use both terms caregiver and parent for the participants used in this study, respecting the traditional value of child rearing.

First Nations: Is a term used by Aboriginal groups of Native political organizations to refer to themselves. It means the first people of Canada.

Formal education: the process of education introduced by the Euro-Canadians.

Narratives: the voice of a individual expressing a reality. “Narrative, therefore, can convey the messiness of reality and the moral life and also something of its thickness and complexity”(Winston, 1998, p.18).

Native Americans: Is a term used by Native people of United States.

Oral Tradition: the process of traditional education which effectively preserved and transmitted the world view, values, philosophy and ideas of a particular culture. This process was used by Aboriginal people to teach their young; this process is still used today. Although there may be recognizable discrepancies between the teller and their stories, the spirit and intent of these narratives are a valid form of transmitting information.

Red Road: Is the Dakota's spiritual journey. A person is to implementing all components of the Medicine wheel-emotional, physical, mental and spiritual– with the intention of nourishing the spirit.

Story: Is a planned expression of some happenings or a group of happenings.

Wahpeton: An Aboriginal reserve located approximately ten miles north-west of Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, Canada.